साहित्य

BALARAMA DAS

Chittaranjan Das

Makers of Indian Literature

Pancha-sakhas or the famous band of five Bhakta poets in Oriya literature flourished in the sixteenth century.

Balarama Das the oldest and the most talented of this group was born around 1470. Balarama Das, the author of the Oriya Ramayana, came under the influence of Chaitanya Deva, when he came to Puri.

The three books of Oriya literature known to every family in Orissa are the Oriya Mahabharata of Sarala Das, Oriya Bhagavata of Jagannatha Das and Oriya Ramayana of Balarama Das.

Balarama Das excels more as a poet than as a narrator of the Ramayana story in Oriya.

Balarama Das was known as a bhakta of protest—the Panchasakhas were against all authoritarian gurubad—this led some scholars to suggest that they were Prachhanna Bauddhas.

Sri Chittaranjan Das, a profound Oriya scholar has taken great pains in analysing the life and works of this great Oriya poet in this monograph.

Cover Inset : A Page from Balarama Dasa's Dandi Ramayana.

Courtesy : Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar

Cover Design : Satyajit Ray

Lettering : Shyamal Sen

Sahitya Akademi
Revised Price Rs. 10·00

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SAHITYA AKADEMI
NEW DELHI

First Published 1982

SAHITYA AKADEMI

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29, Eldams Road, Madras 600 018 172, Mumbai
Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya Marg, Bombay 400 014

Published by Sahitya Akademi New Delhi 110 001 and Printed
by the Pooran Press, 21 Balaram Ghose Street. Calcutta-4.

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Chapter I

THE THREE STORIES

AT the outset, it may be worthwhile to begin with three stories, narrated by Balarama Das himself in three of his books. Most probably, they are just legands and nothing more. Yet they have deeper implications. In fact, to what these stories tell of are ascribed to have provided the occasions for the author to write those books.

The first story tells of an incident when Balarama Das was about twenty five years of age. He was living in Puri at that time, and was very much interested in religious studies and discourses. Within the precincts of the Jagannatha temple at Puri, there used to be held assemblies where great scholars and pundits discussed and discoursed on religion and philosophy. Traditionally, only those of the Brahmin caste participated in these discussions and only Brahmins were allowed to listen to these discourses. Of course, on occasion the king of Orissa, if he happened to be within the temple premises on a darshan to the Lord, could be present and benefit from the learned exchange.

The incident of the story is calculated to have happened about the year 1509 or 1510. The day was a specially auspicious one, and the learned men had gathered together to listen to a debate on some particular points in the Vedanta philosophy. As it would happen not infrequently, there was a difference of opinion in the elucidation of a certain subtle point and before long the dispute waxed into a real quarrel. The entire assembly was all agog for a show down as it were and the listeners were soon taking sides. Young Balarama Das who was present there in the guise of a Brahmin stood up and began to speak.

He really astounded the scholars present with his speech. He gave, to everyone's satisfaction, an explanation that brought the debate to a peaceful conclusion. As the Brahmins began to admire the abilities of the new face among them, they also wondered who this intruder could be. In no time they were able to discover that the latter was an outsider who had no right to be there, much less to take part in the discussions. The entire assembly was soon on one side hurling abuse and imprecations at Balarama Das for violating the sacred conventions. How could he, a son of a Shudra, dare come into an assembly which was exclusively meant for the Brahmins and—a horror of horrors—speak there ? There was no end to the angry words.

The culprit was then taken to the king and a complaint lodged. The accusation was that a person who was born in other than a Brahmin caste had no right to the sacred knowledge and its interpretation and it was pleaded that the one who had done this should be severely punished. The king, who more often than not should represent the conventional oughts and ought-nots, did not have any difficulty in being convinced about the propriety of the accusation and he too was very angry and gave the offender a good scolding. That encouraged the Brahmins to be yet more sharp-tongued in their railleries. This was more than what Balarama Das could endure and he is said to have exclaimed, "O king, it is strange that you too should join the others in himiliating me ! But the fact is, not only I, but anyone on whose head I shall put my hand, will be able without fail to speak on the Vedanta. If you want, I can prove it to you, even tomorrow".

That further irritated an already angry king, who had all the others present there to stoke his ire. He had the entire tradition on his side, and power too. He ordered Balarama Das to be kept in confinement within the temple premises for the night and the latter was told that he must prove his ability to make the Vedanta spoken through the mouth of whosoever would be produced before him on the

morrow. The whole night Balarama spent in the prison in prayer to Lord Jagannatha to help him through the test. Next morning the king and the Brahmins were again in the temple and they had brought a man with them, an ignoramus who had absolutely no knowledge of the Shastras. With Jagannatha in his mind, Balarama asked the man to explain to the audience the secret knowledge of the Vedanta as the king and the others with him wanted. The story goes that it really happened so to the surprise of all present. The admiring king and the dumbfounded others then made a request to Balarama Das that he himself give a discourse on Vedanta. The result was what constitutes the poet's *Vedāntasara Gupta Geetā*. The king was so pleased that he addressed Balarama as his greater guru, as he had already accepted Shri Chaitanya as his guru.

There is another version of the same story in the appendix of Balarama Das's Oriya translation of the Shrimat Bhagavadgita. There describing the circumstances that led to his undertaking the translation, Balarama Das says that one morning he had gone to the temple of Jagannatha at Puri when the priests were busy dressing the celebrated deities in all their robes and ornaments. The king was also present there. After the usual morning oblations were over, the king had a schedule that day to go to the assembly of the learned men within the temple premises and listen to discourses on the supreme knowledge. Young Balarama thought this was also a great chance for him and he did not wish to miss it. He joined the blessed crowd of listeners in the guise of a Brahmin and heard a full discourse on the Gita by a very learned Brahmin. But he was caught as an intruder when the discourses were over. To listen to these was a privilege of the Brahmins only, and a Shudra had no right to it. Balarama was called a dog who had aspired to eat the food meant exclusively for a much superior class of beings. He was kept in confinement to be produced before the king when he came in the evening. Balarama Das, who was not a Brahmin had been in an assembly of the Brahmins and

had partaken of a discourse for which there was no social sanction, ought to be taught an appropriate lesson. The king agreed and Balarama Das was brought before the king, the guardian of the law. The king asked Balarama to explain why he had dared such an infringement of the law. The latter humbly answered : Everyone who has an aspiration for the Supreme knowledge has a right to that knowledge, irrespective of his caste, creed and other denominational marks. The Gita is a book which contains that knowledge and is meant for whosoever is a *Bhakta* and has the right hunger. It can never be the monopoly of the Brahmins only. For the rightly devoted no area of knowledge nor any scripture for that matter ought to remain inaccessible. If sacred knowledge is to be kept as secret knowledge meant only for the few higher-born, and if it so pleases the king, tomorrow at the time of the God's worship at the temple, he, Balarama Das would get the Gita recited by an untouchable.

This was no doubt more than what was expected of the accused. The king ordered his men to take Balarama Das back to confinement to be produced before him at a fixed hour the next day. Balarama had now to invoke the help of Lord Jagannatha Himself to help him out of this crisis. He went on praying to the Lord who alone could save him from the wrath of the king. Thus the hours passed by and it was already night. The temple doors were locked and everybody retired. After midnight, in the small hours of stillness about him, Balarama had a dream. No other than the Lord Jagannatha himself in all His splendour of grace with his consort Lakshmi Devi was before him. As Balarama Das himself has narrated, The Lord Himself then commanded him to render a full version of the Gita in Prakṛt, the spoken language of the people. With the help thus obtained and with the divine inspiration as his guide, Balarama was able to complete the assignment by the end of the night. When the king came to the temple in the morning, he ordered for Balarama Das to be produced

before him and as the latter was brought, the Gita in hand, the king, who had already an assembly of Brahmins and noblemen gathered round him, wanted that Balarama Das should, as he had promised, get the whole Gita recited by some one of low caste. When Balarama pointed out that it was not possible for anyone born in a low caste to come within the premises of the sacred temple the king commanded him to recite the Gita himself. Balarama Das, thus commanded, read out the entire Gita in Prakrt, which he had just composed. The whole assembly together with the king was truly astonished by the recitation and was full of admiration for the writer of the text.

The second story has been narrated by Balarama Das in another of his small works. According to it, Balarama Das once felt a desire to visit Lanka to pay his homage to Bibhisana and see for himself all the places associated with the Lord's heroic feats there in a previous era. Lord Jagannatha, who was no one else than Rama, knew Balarama Das's mind and wanted to grant him a boon. The trip was arranged by Lord Jagannath to take place on the same night, after the day's routine of worship would be over in the temple and after everybody had gone home to retire. When the appointed hour came, Lord Jagannatha ordered Balarama to follow him (the Lord) with his (the Lord's) own jewelled canopy in hand. It was indeed an incomparable privilege for a mortal to walk in the footsteps of the Lord himself showing the way. The journey both ways was over just about dawn, and Balarama was so much beside himself with the joy of his unbelievable fortune and so busy in singing the praise of the Lord that he forgot to put the canopy back in its place in the temple. In the morning, the temple priests found the canopy missing and reported to the king. There was great consternation in all quarters that were concerned. When Balarama came to know of this, he disclosed that the canopy was with him, but, quite understandably he could not reveal why it was with him and not in temple. This evoked great anger in the king and

he spared no words in reprimanding the misdemeanant. Balarama had to give out the truth and all that had happened during the previous night. The king and all others present had then only great surprise to express. Balarama went home and put down the experience in verse. Mention may be made here of the popular belief, prevailing at Puri even down to this day, that Bibhisana, the king of Lanka comes to Puri everyday for a darshan of the Lord Jagannatha.

And the third story is no less fascinating and no less sincerely recorded. The scene is again set at Puri, and the time is that of the precious car-festival when the deities in the temple come out once a year. They are put ceremoniously on their respective cars, bearing the irrespective flags and occupying their respective places in the order of the great procession. Devotees deem it a great moment in their life to be able to ride with the deities on these chariots. No doubt enthusiasm was as great in the days of Balarama Das as it is to-day. But convantionally, only a selected few had an access to this rare privilege, and it was almost fixed who from amony the local populace could have it. Balarama Das was certainly not one of them. But he ought not accept the deprivation and tried to attain stealthily what was denied to him. Not born a Brahmin, he nevertheless made an attempt to find his way in to Lord Jagannatha's car along with the others who were doing so, as it were, by right. But this attempt of his was detected by the car-attendants, and with the permission of the king. they drove him out and threw him down. It is said that they also manhandled him. The crowd feared him. The humiliation was great and Balarama had to swallow it but sorely wounded in his feelings as he was, he was not one to give in so easily. He left the festival scene and proceeded straight to a place by the sea sketched a chariot on the sand and with great fervour, poured out his heart to the Lord in prayer. According to Balarama's own narrative piece which he composed on the occasion, Lord Jagannatha

himself was greatly pained and moved at the ill-treatment meted out to one of his devotees and as a protest and in reparation, chose to be on the car sketched on sand by Balarama and not on the festival car. As a result, the festival car did not move, to the great dismay of the king and great disappointment of the pilgrims present in thousands. The day ended in confusion, everybody deeply agrieved and agitated over what had happened, and wondering what the cause might be. During the night the king had a dream in which the Lord himself appeared before him and explained to him why the festival car did not move: it was because on the insult and humiliation that one of his devotees had suffered that he (the Lord) had taken this decision to leave the car installed by the king's orders and choose rather to be on the one drawn on sand on the beach by the devotee himself. That was enough to convince the king of the wrong done and he immediately rushed to the beach and apologised to Balarama Das. Then only could the institutional car be moved the next day. The incident has been recorded in verse by Balarama Das in again, one of his small books, called "Bhāba Samūdra".

We have chosen to start the book with these three stories not without reason. As we have already said, these are stories, nothing more than stories or legends, and most probably with a great deal of exaggeration in them. But they nevertheless hint at something which has to be remembered all along as we proceed to try to understand and rightly appreciate Balarama Das and the age he represents in Oriya literature. Balarama Das and the others of his ilk were out-of-court poets, they were sort of rebels in many a respect. They had revolted against the sacrosant traditions in literature as well as in religion. They were Sadhakas, essentially Sadhakas, and their poetry and poetic imagination were only an expression of the experiences on their path as Sadhakas. They were against the usages of contemporary society, against caste-determination when it was a question of getting an access to truth and to the Shastras that contain it.

This trend in Oriya literature had virtually made its dent already in the 15th century, right from Sāralā Das, the celebrated author of the Oriya Mahabharata, the maker of the Oriya language, whose successful experiments showed that the subtlest thoughts could be expressed in the spoken language of the people and also proved that all people could have an access to the scriptures through translation. Sarala Das has in more than one place described himself as "Shudramuni". We have seen how Balarama Das was also condemned as a "Shudramuni" by the pundits of the establishment in the temple of Jagannatha at Puri. The expression "Shudra" should mean here a "non-Brahmin" only and not anything else. We shall have later more occasions, in the course of the book, to go into the real significance of this word.

Lord Jagannatha's temple at Puri has been ironically the symbol of the authority that has ruled the various institutions of society in Orissa from age to age, both mundane and extramundane. The king of Orissa has always been sung as the very first devotee and worshipper of the deities in the Puri temple. Though literally Jagannatha ought to mean the Lord of the world and though he has been sung so in a similar vein by almost a legion of adorers, the institution as such has not been even to this day, able to open its door to all caste, religions and denominations, notwithstanding. Very celebrated scholars, philosophers, expounders of new cults and religions have come to Puri all through the last many centuries. There are even to-day the many who proffer historical evidence to show that Jagannatha stands for a synthesis and not for a special cult or creed ; still, in actual practice, the whole institution has customarily belonged to a special class or to some special classes only and the care-takers and owners have seldom been as large-minded in their attitudes as the name of the deity should suggest. Puri, or Jagannatha for that matter, has not played the role expected of it by virtue of its inspirational commitments and has yet appropriated a status for itself, which it perhaps never deserved.

And accordingly, all through the centuries, there has been a group of non-conformers, poets, saints, sannyasins and Sadhakas, who have raised a voice of protest against the conventions, againsts institutional arrogance and various sorts of exclusiveness in attitude and in treatment. They have all, almost without a single exception, proclaimed themselves as devotees, they have sung about the "Lord of the World", declared that they owed all their achievement to the grace of the great Lord Jagannatha, but, at the same time they have protested against the institution and the establishment. They have raised their voice against exclusiveness. They have professed themselves to be on the other side of discriminations, of special rights, of a dominant group psychology. There has been all through a tendency among scholars to mix up everything into as it were a sentimental agglomorate, brand it as a synthesis and perhaps in a mood of overstatement assert that Orissa has had the privilege of having housed the Lord of Lords and thus has come to represent a unique tradition. And after that, it has never been a long way at all to be happy over the fact that Orissa's national God, Lord Jagannatha, has in fact stood for universality, for universal friendship and universal amity. Fully recognising the bonafides of the claim, it has nevertheless to be submitted that Jagannatha in history has not been like that, that it has often become a cult and come to be treated as a possession by those who have overzealously used him as a cult. And, what is more, there has been all through a protest against this cultish fervour.

The stories narrated by Balarama Das and the personal experiences expressed through these stories only go to establish that there has been a parallel trend of protest through the ages. Balarama Das has all along extolled himself as a devotee of the Lord Jagannatha. He has also subscribed to the view, as almost everyone of his contemporaries belonging to the various camps did, that Vishnu has manifested himself as Lord Jagannatha in his ninth incarnation upon earth. Almost all his works oneset to convince us that whatever

he has been able to be, to achieve and to write during the few years of his life as a Sadhaka, has been entirely due to the grace of Lord Jagannatha. Balarama Das did spent the prime years of his life at Puri, only because by doing so he could be in proximity to the Lord and to his Leela. But at the same time, Balarama Das has all along kept himself outside the establishment ; what is more, he has more than once tried to break the unjust conventions, has protested against the odd obsessions of the establishment. And, to crown all that, he has proved that real spiritual and even Shastric achievement does in no way dependupon being born in a high caste or upon enjoying royal patronage and approval.

CHAPTER II

THE ELDEST OF THE PANCHASKHĀS

THE first seven decades of the sixteenth century has come to be known as the Panchasakha period in Orissa's literary history. The Panchasakha refers to the five Bhakta poets of that time, who were not only contemporaries, but also Sakhās, collaborators and friends. Though born in different parts of coastal Orissa, they had all come to Puri, the seat of Lord Jagannatha. They were definitely all there during the last part of their lives.

The five Sadhaka poets are Balarama Das, Jagannatha Das, Jasobanta Das and Achyutananda Das. Balarama Das was the eldest of them. His year of birth has been fixed almost unanimously by all scholars to be around 1470. Because of paucity of definite historical evidence, there is also an opinion that the five Sadhaka poets were not contemporaries at all, and thus the term Panchaskha even has to be taken with a grain of salt. It may be argued nevertheless that often the tradition that persists down the ages is often more dependable as evidence than all hisiriographic calculation. And the tradition seems to show in various ways that the Panchasakha really were contemporaries ; even there are several Bhajans available which have a joint authorship by each of the five Sakhas. Achyutananda and Jashobanta have books written by them where they narrate how the five fellow-Sadhakas really moved and worked together, faced their time together and also left their characteristic imprints together on the socio-religious scene of their time. We have bhajans, still sung by devotees and followers of the Panchasakha religious tradition, which was jointly composed by the Sakhas, each contributing a stanza

in succession to bring out a whole theme.

To be able to properly fix the Panchasakha and assess them on the matrix of their contemporary situation, we have to obtain a somewhat total glimpse of the political and religious state prevailing in Orissa in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. By about that time, Orissa had just come under the rule of the Suryavansi Kings after quite a few centuries of Ganga rule. Further prior to that we had the Kesharis, the Bhaumas and the Karas, and in the earliest times of Orissa's royal lines, we had Kharavela, whose rule was contemporaneous with that of the Sungas in Magadha in the north. King Kapilendra Dev, the founder of the Surya dynasty had ascended the throne in 1435 and ruled for 35 years of glory. His kingdom had extended itself as far south as the Godavari. His son, Sri Purushottama Deva did maintain the glory. He even went still further and defeated the king of Kanchi in a bid to win over the latter's daughter, Padmavati whom he had as his queen. The next king in the line was Prataparudra Deva who ruled longer from 1497 to 1540. Though in the field of military conquests, Prataparudra was in no equal of his predecessors, yet his rule marked a hayday in Orissa's religio-cultural history. Shri Chaitanya came to Puri and lived upto the end of his life when Pratapa was the ruler. The seat of the kingdom was at Puri. And wherever the political capital of Orissa has been from time to time under the different dynasties and kings, Puri has all along remained the cultural cosmopolis in Orissa, occasioned very important exchanges and influences and hatched out new evolutions in the field.

Puri has been the place of Shri Jagannatha since almost the earliest times of Orissa's cultural history. Several legends persuade us to believe that the temple at Puri has been constructed and reconstructed from time to time, but the presiding deities in the temple have remained the same. Poet Sarala Das of the 15th century, in his Oriya Mahabharata, has identified Jagannatha as none else than Krishna, who, according to him, after the decline at Dwarka and

after he gave up his body, reappeared on the coast at Purushottama Kshetra, Puri, and has since then been being worshipped as Lord Jagannatha. The Utkala Khanda of the Sanskṛt Skanda Purana also suggests Jagannatha to be identical with Krishna Vasudeva. It has to be remembered also that Sarala Das thought of Jagannatha as the Buddha and Buddha again as the Supreme Eternal, without a shape and without manifestation. It has been inferred again by scholars that Jagannath witha the cultish tradition running down in his name was a pre-Aryan deity, appropriated by the Aryans when they later came to Orissa and held sway.

Puri has been the place where almost all the religious and cultural strands in India happen to have met. The very physical position of Orissa has helped Orissa since long ago work as a meeting point between the north and the south in India in many a respect, between the Aryan and the the Dravidian. The Oriya language and script, the music, dance and even social usages bear supporting testimony to this hypothesis. The so-called northern and southern trends of Buddhism have rubbed shoulders in Orissa. It is surmised that quite a large part of Orissa was Jaina before it came under the shadow of Buddhistic influence during Ashoka. For many centuries, Orissa especially the coastal districts had been under the spell of the Tantric schools. And even to-day one can hear the songs of Gorakhnath and several of his line being sung by semi-wandering beggars, popularly called Jogis in Orissa. Orissa has received Vaishnavism from both the North and the South. Besides, other influences and movements like the Shakta and the Shaiva have also had their day and their adherents in Orissa.

Jagannatha having been the synthesizing assimilator of almost all the religious and spiritual traditions of India down the centuries and Puri having been the seat of Lord Jagannatha it will be very easily understood that the greatest and the most reputed spiritual leaders have come on sojourn to Puri, have as it were felt it their duty to keep Puri within

their peregrinations. And there should be little doubt that they have thus made each their respective contribution to give in the long run a form to the totality of religious inspiration that Puri has embodied in course of time. Thus in Puri, and in the entire religious scene of Orissa, denominational distinctions have got very much confused in a sort of synthesis that has always expressed itself in an all-accepting attitude stressing upon an inner sincerity as the real credential of one's spiritual pursuit irrespective of what particular sect or brand he may be subscribing to.

Shankaracharya, the celebrated monist-cum-Mayavadin had been at Puri during his tour round the country to bear down all philosophical opposition. He had established a monastery of his own order at Puri, a monastery which exists even to-day. The famous Samskṛt verse in adoration of the "Vamana on the chariot" goes in the name of Shankara himself. The dualist Ramanuja was at Puri during the Chola rule, in about the end of the twelfth century. And Ramananda came towards the end of the fourteenth century. The renowned scholar Vallabhacharya of the Shuddhadwaita group came to and expounded his theories at Puri also in the fifteenth century. To name a few others in the same order of fame, we have Kabir who is said to have been at Puri in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Guru Nanak also had come all the way from the far north to this great seat of Lord Jagannatha in the fifteenth century. It is interesting to note that all the travelling saints of the different sects of the Vedanta school did establish their respective maths at Puri which are thriving even to-day. Also interesting is the existence, since those days of Kabir's visit to Puri, of Kabir chaura trying to preserve the memory of the significant visit. All of them, however, did not come to Puri to make conquests. Nanak, for example, had no such proselytising interest. He had come to Puri only because of the repute with which Puri in those days occupied a special place on the spiritual map of India. Moreover the round-the-year festivities at Puri

drew pilgrims in thousands from all over India, it drew also inquiring minds who wanted to enrich themselves by listening to learned discourses delivered by very learned and realised souls belonging to the various disciplines. Thus, it will not at all be difficult to imagine that, seen upon this background of the significant visits and the keenness with which these visits were undertaken, Puri, during the middle age, was one of the very fertile and lively centres of intellectual give and take and inspirational sharing. On the one hand Puri has always kept its doors open to whosever came there with a mission or with a quest. And on the other hand, those celebrities in their own fields who came did never enter into any mutually destroying strife with another. They each of them had their say, they had always an assembly of listeners before them, and within the rules of that tradition, there was absolutely no danger of one trying to swallow up the other. The side that benefitted most from the encounters was Puri itself. And in Puri was thus shaped, in course of the centuries and through these continuous encounters, an attitude which was essentially accepting and affirming, which saw the meeting points more than the details of difference.

It will not be out of place here to make a brief survey of the Indian literary scene during the 15th and the 16th centuries. In almost all the Indian languages during these two centuries, in the north as well as in the South, we find an upheaval that was of a very great significance in shaping Indian religion and Indian society of the time. All over, we have then a large number of mystics and saints who had also taken to writing, to social reform and a universalisation of man's most intimate of sentiments, the religious sentiment. Almost all of them were wanderers, wanderers in the name of God and in the service of the people. They were against the establishment, against all monastic clinging, against all sectarian zealotry and against intra-caste discriminations in society, All of them claimed a relevance for religion in life as such, in the sphere of real human aspirations and

relationships. Some people have described this as a Bhakti movement, some others a Nirguna upheaval; we may call it a quest after real roots, after a universal base where a real unity among men could be traced out, a search after finding the really common raison d'etre in man's inner as well as outer living. The leaders of these centuries were against all externalisations, external forms that conceal more than they claim to express, divide the souls more than they ever bring them together. Religion, in the songs of these poet-saints ceased to be the dry scholastic rigour it has been for quite a long time, in the garb of a particular language not accessible to all and in the hands of a particular class and caste that was very exclusive in its outlook. Religion became life, life elevated, life of all who have aspiration, irrespective of the external determinations.

Making a swift survey round the country to get an acquaintance with the characteristic surge during the age, we may begin with the Haridasas of Karnataka who flourished there from the 13th to the 18th centuries. Beginning from almost the first exponent, Shri Narahari Tirtha, the age stretches itself through Purandara Das and Karana Das about the middle of the 16th century. Most of these Haridasas hailed from the lower strata of society and the lower castes. This Haridasa order in Karnatak was split in the beginning of the 16th century into two groups, the Vyāsakutas and the Dāsakutas. It is worth mentioning that the former had taken Sanskrit as the medium of their writings while the latter had taken to spoken Kannada. The Vyasakuta comprised, as a rule, of the higher-born Haridasas, while the Dasakuta could afford to take followers from all castes, including the very lew. The same period has given us the celebrated Marathi saints like Eknath, Jnadadev and Namdev who ought to have Marathi saints like Eknath., Jnadadev and Namdev who ought to have definitely come in contact with the Haridasas at Karnataka. It is said that Gujarat too had a Dasa tradition and lineage. Narsi Mehta of Gujrat and Mira Bai of Rajasthan also

belonged to the fifteenth century. In Assam, we have Shankaradev and Madhavadev as the celebrated parallels. And in the Hindi-speaking tracts, we have the galaxy that includes Kabir, Raidas, Tulsidas, Nanak and Surdas. It has been said that Dharma Das, one of the chief disciples of Kabir, really died at Puri, Orissa, and at that time none other than Kabir himself was present by his side. And last, but not the least, we have Shri Chaitanya in Bengal, who subscribed in many ways to the same trends though what he propounded was very faithfully put into the books as a special school of Vaishnavism.

To this common age and common trends all over India, Orissa's share has been made through the Panchasakha. These five saints have been at once identified as Buddhists, Gorakhpanthis and Vaishnavas of the Chaitanya category by various students of literature and research. Those who see in the deities being worshipped in the temple at Puri nothing but remains of the Buddhist Triratna tend to say that the Panchasakha were also Baudhhas, the last specimens of the Buddha Order which had once flourished and had its day in Orissa for quite some centuries. Because the Panchasakhas, in several of their works have given a meticulous description of the Chakra Sadhana for the perfection of the body and who were themselves sadhakas in this line, some have called them Kayasadhakas or Gorakh-panthis. And some other again, who for one or another reason, over-emphasized Shri Chaitanya's coming to and preaching in Orissa have described the Panchasakha as Vaishnavas of the Chaitanyaite denomination. Seen from what the works of the Panchasakha have outwardly expressed, it can very easily be said that the Panchasakha were really all that, but they, were, to be more exact and nearer the truth, much more than that. They were aspirants, at their very base and in their excellence. They did not have any hesitation to take from whatever contact that came on their way. They assimilated in themselves whatever could be assimilated, were never shy to accept as Guru all those from whom they

learnt something and to express their gratitude for that; but they never fell into any groove, neither did they exclusively declare any particular denomination to be theirs. They accepted Gorakhnath and the Tantra. They accepted the one essence beyond all outward representations of Him as sincerely as any avowed Adwaitin, they accepted Shri Chaitanya as their Guru while the latter was at Puri, but in everything that they were moved to do, they accepted Lord Jagannatha as the real inspirer and the mover, and nevertheless, defied on many occasions the institutional gloss that had gathered round Jagannatha, in course of the centuries. Jagannatha, for all the five of them, was the Deity beyond all conceivable deities, the Godhead beyond the gods. They took care never to loose track with the one, the Brahma, while worshipping Him through all His innumerable names.

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The Panchasakha had been born in different parts of coastal Orissa. They had traversed their various courses of life and pursued their own course of development before they came to Puri. They had been, each of them, nourished in the Orissan Vaishnava tradition, which had deep roots in the local soil. The roots had taken saps from the various religious movements which had made themselves felt in Orissa and influenced the religious attitudes through several centuries. Of the five, Balarama and Jagannatha belonged to Puri itself or to its immediate vicinities. The five came together when Shri Chaitanya and his movement with the royal patronisation were at their high tide at Puri. The piquancy of the moment tended to suggest that the only course was to go with the tide. The Panchasakha did go with the tide, as far as a first formal initiation was concerned. But it was never going to stop at that. They, at least Balarama and Jagannatha among them were already well-known in Puri as Bhaktas, as writers of repute and as great aspirants on the way. They felt they had another

mission before them. Achyutananda says in one of his books how he together with the rest of the Sakhas, convened an assembly of sacred men and leaders of all shades of spiritual sadhana which were extant at that time and yet had withdrawn somewhat to background because the king had proclaimed his all-out favour and patronage for the Chaitanya movement. The Panchasakha had convened this assembly in the forests somewhere on the bank of the river Prachi, about twenty miles to the north of Puri, not with the object of forming a new parallel order of their own to which all the assembled others would have to adhere. There was no preaching in this assembly and no zeal shown to bring together everybody under the fold of any particular order or brand of a denomination. It was rather an occasion for a reaffirmation of being reminded of the special style that had characterised almost all spiritual sadhana in Orissa, through the ages. The style had been to recognise the value of all paths, never to swallow up a few paths in order to establish a few others, to be able to take the essentials from all, to be able to synthesise, and above all that to follow with sincerity, the way one has accepted as appropriate for oneself. It will be very clear that after this assembly, the Panchasakha did not go back to Puri to become Chaitanyaites pure and simple, they had found a path of their own with its specific stresses and nuances. The Chaitanya movement had come to Orissa from outside and in its wake of an upsurge as it were and having won over the king of Orissa to its side, had established itself as an imposition and a superstructure. The Panchasakha movement worked for furtherance which was also a reaffirmation at the same time, it wanted to inspire a renewal. The former aspired to conquer and take by storm while the latter sought to fulfil, to revitalise and nurture out a synthesis.

The Panchasakha, Balarama Das included, were not Vaishnavas in the strict sense that they belonged to a particular sect munching injunctions ; they were Vaishnavas, neverthe-

less, because they had dedicated themselves to a seeking, learnt from all the ways to enrich that seeking, looked at everything with the eye of a devotee and a seeker. In their works we come across converging points that indicate that they took very much from the total gamut of the Indian great tradition. The way they explain the process of the Supreme Truth's manifesting Himself through creation can be traced as similar in more than one respect to the most ancient Vedic and Upanisadic explanations. The very composition of the simple Oriya verses often go to suggest that their authors had really gone into the Vedic texts and their interpretations and known how to reduce all that into fine poetry.

All through the history of Indian Sadhana, there has long been almost a war between what have come to be known as the Saguna and the Nirguna ways, seeking the ultimate Reality through an intermediary imagined deity and seeking the same beyond all image-making. In a Saguna camp, the one God has been contemplated as three and the process has culminated with the help of our Puranic wings in innovating a divine assembly of several millions. Seeking through idol-worship has at times landed itself in senseless idolatry till a reaction has set in and people have again been asked to come back to the root, to the One. Orissa has of course had always its share in the tides of ebb and flow of this Saguna worship, under its various garbs, Vedic, Tantric and Buddhists. The very rich sculptural panorama depicted on the Orissan temples will go to prove that the Sadhakas here never fell behind others elsewhere in weaving out various forms of worship and adoration based on Vishnu, Shiva, Narasimgha and the consorts of all these under a hundred and one names. The single temple premises of Lord Jagannatha at Puri will give us in one glimpse the whole cluster of these gods and goddesses. There has been, besides no end to the speculation about whether the Jagannatha triad is Vedic, Tantric, Jaina or Buddhist, or even whether it is only a symbolic caricatural representation declaring an

elimination of all deities.

The Panchasakha have sung of Rama, Krishna, of Jagannatha, of Buddha, of the Universe that can be discovered in the body (a treatise by Balarama Das has thus been named Brahmanda Bhugola), of the chakras, of the various Saguna mantras, of the names and also of Brahma. Are they to be taken as worshippers of these deities, Sagunas or as Nirguna bhaktas who wanted to soar beyond these representations? It will be well to keep in mind that the Panchasakha have not denied the deities, at the same time they have decried all idol worshipping zealotry, a zeal that stops at the idols. The idols are the means, the media; the goal is God-realisation, self-realisation and nothing less than that. Though admitting of all names, Balarama Das has it said in the mouth of God Himself in Birata Gita: "I rest only in the Mahasunya, which is a region beyond all nāma. I have no name in my essence, I am the nameless Brahman."

The institution of Guru is also very well-known in all strands of Indian Sadhana. Guruvada has always occupied a very significant place in the great tradition of Indian spiritual heritage. The Panchasakha have also warned us that without the Guru coming to help, one cannot know the real Truth in the world. Balarama Das, in unanimity with all the other Sakhas, has elevated the Guru to the position of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu; has equated him with the ultimate God always to be looked upon like that and not as an ordinary human being. But as in everything else, the Panchasakha have revolted against the idea of making an idol of the Guru. A Guru who encourages helpless dependence and making an idol of himself, will be more a hindrance than a help according to the Panchasakha. The Guru also is a means, not an end. In the words of Achyutananda; one has to deserve the realisation aspired for, make oneself pure and ready. One has to discover the Truth oneself, with one's own efforts; the Guru will be there as a guide only, helping you chalk out your own way.

The externalities and being occupied too much with them have been laughed away by the Panchasakha and here they are very much in the line of the Sadhakas of medieval India, to whichever region they might have belonged. The Panchasakha had come of a time when people were engaged in all sorts of ritualistic gymnastics, showing off in a bid to beat one another as it were. One could come across an overdone exhibition of it if one was at Puri at that time. The learned men kept trumpeting their Shastric vehemences and particular sects were allowed to flaunt all their externals because they could get the patronization of the king. The followers of various sects were put to competitive tests simply for the pleasure of the then kings and queens. The Sadhana aspect of all religious pursuit, the experience aspect of it was almost totally lost sight of. Though the banners were flying high and the maths were progressively prospering, real aspiration was seldom to be seen. Demonstrations of magic and occultism became a source of fun. The Panchasakha, in a way to cleanse this stable as it were, had to expose the shallowness of the entire show and for that they had to incur the wrath of the ruler and the ruled as well more than once. But neither the king's anger nor popular displeasure deterred them from exposing the non-essentials. They denounced the false ways of the false gurus whose only job was to dupe the people and lead the believing souls astray, who mistook the outward practices for real spiritual realisation. Addressing the people, they boldly declared, "Merely covering one's body with dust cannot make one a servant of God. With the tiger skin on, you will only look like the animal whose skin you put on." Again, "If you have the garb of a Vaishnava and yet do not live the Vaishnava life, you will be only violating the Vaishnava path." And, in a final clinching of the issue, "Beneath the long hair and everything of the like, we are all His people. But as for a real disciple who has truly chosen Him only one will be found in a million." Balarama Das has said that how one takes thing in one's mind is the really important thing,

everything else including the Mantras are only means. And in this strain Achyutananda seems to excel all others when he says, "with a mind that has not been calmed and made ready for further attainments, all yogic practices and austere repetitions are sure to go in vain. Mind thus is the guru, it is the root, the real player. Mind is the Bhagavata and the Gita ; and when that is not ready and confident, even nectar is sure to taste bitter."

The emphasis was upon the right attitude, upon readiness and receptiveness. With this available within, it does not matter what path one takes and what denomination, if any at all, one belong to. Sincerity is the keyword, inner growth is the measuring rod, and a certain breadth of view is the sign that one is going in the right direction. In tune with the Indian mystic saints all over India in the middle ages, the Panchasakha have proclaimed that the liberating knowledge is in your heart itself and you have to search for it, grow up to it and translate it into a life. They have declared that knowledge of the Divine is not at all a remote thing, but it is in the very temple that is each one of us.

So, not all of those who go by the name of Bhaktas are Bhaktas. Achyutananda has dealt with them in a satirical sort of stance : "There are bhaktas who go on chattering without end, there are bhaktas who will take food from any home whatsoever. There are bhaktas who perform occult acts and bhaktas who make offerings. There are wandering bhaktas who carry flags to make a display of them, and there are bhaktas who are smeared all over the body (with dust or ashes). He who has attained a right understanding of the divine name, is the real bhakta. And a bhakta who has actually been able to see, is the most excellent among them."

Thus the Panchasakha were anti-externalism, anti-pundit and anti-exhibitionist. They were all for sincerity, sincerity of aspiration, sincerity at heart and sincerity in respect of readiness. They were bhaktas, jnanins and men of deed all blended into a totality that is life. They aspired for this life to dawn upon the age they belonged to.

Chapter III

THE ORIYA RAMAYANA

THE three books of Oriya literature which are likely to be found in the possession almost of every family in Orissa are, the Oriya Mahabharata of Sarala Dasa belonging to the fifteenth century, the Oriya Bhagabata of Jagannatha Das and the Oriya Ramayana of Balarama Das, the second and the third belonging to the Panchasakha period, to the century that followed the one in which the first was written. All these three books had been originally written in Sanskrit and still belong to India's ageless tradition. There have been more than one translation of these great works into each of the Indian regional languages from time to time and the attempts have continued till to-day. But the above three books which have won such a high place in Orissa's literary and cultural history are not at all faithful translations of the originals. Even the themes in the original works have been very neat-handedly adorned with additions, variations and interpolations. Sarala Dasa's Mahabharata was a pioneer in this direction and has the credit of having given a rich wealth of vocabulary and imagery to the evolving Oriya language which was then getting out of its Sanskṛt and Prakṛt strangleholds. The Bhagabata of Jagannatha Das and the Ramayana of Balarama Das have followed in the same line. And all these three have remained so many adored pieces of treasure in Oriya literature and the households in Orissa. They have not grown old with age.

Balarama Das's Ramayana is known as the Jagamohana Ramayana and it has been named so by the author himself. As the author has said in several places in the work, he had got the inspiration to set out making poetry on a theme like

this from no less august a source than Lord Jagannatha Himself, synonymously called also Jagamohana and so he named this work of his as the Jagamohana Ramayana. Balarama further says that he used to listen to Shastras and Puranas from the mouths of the Brahmins and thus was moved to write one like those himself. Being an inhabitant of Puri, he must have been in the habit of frequenting the temple of Lord Jagannatha, where it has long been a custom to read aloud the popular sacred books like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Bhagabata. Even to-day within the temple precincts of several places and especially during the months held particularly sacred one will come across groups of people listening to Bhagabata or Ramayana being sung aloud.

In many parts of Orissa, Balarama Das's Jagamohana Ramayana is popularly called the Dakshini Ramayana or the Ramayana from the South. There are, it has been said by the scholars of Ramayana, three textual versions of the Sanskrit Ramayana according to manuscripts obtained in the country and subsequently printed. They are the north-western version, the eastern version found mainly in Bengal and the Deccan version. While planning his own version of the Ramayana, Balarama seems to have followed the Deccan version of the original epic in Sanskrit. It may be mentioned here that Orissa was more open toward the South than to the north by about the 15th-16th centuries. There had been a long dynasty of kings, the Gangas, who had come from the South and ruled Orissa. It was during the Ganga's rule that the famous temple of Lord Jagannatha at Puri and the Sun-temple of Konark were constructed. Most of Orissa's military expeditions had been towards the South. Cultural communication increased through these encounters also. Most of the great scholars and religious leaders, all the pioneers in the revival of Hindu Dharma in Orissa after it had been steeped in Buddhism for quite some centuries also came from the South. These leaders, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Ballavacharya, Nimbarka and a good

many others had been erudite Sanskrit scholars also.

Moreover. the move to translate the great books of religious lore to the regional languages or said more correctly, to the very language of the people, had actually first started in the southern language regions. This can be traced as far back as to the 10th and 11th centuries. Kamban, the maker of the Tamil Ramayana, is said to have belonged to a time as early as that. Already three versions of the Ramayana in Telugu, the Ranganatha Ramayana, the Bhaskara Ramayana and the Nirvachanottara Ramayana, had appeared in the 14th century. The Telugu Bhagabata was brought out by the great Telugu poet Pottana, the Shrimadandhra Bhagabata, in the fifteenth century. Almost a contemporary of Pottana, Atukuri Molla, earned the honour of having written yet a fourth version of the Ramayana in Telugu, called the Molla Ramayana. Translating the Mahabharata in Telugu is said to have actually started in the 11th century and completed in the fourteenth. In Kannada, we have the Pampa Bharata written by Pampa and the Pampa Ramayana written by Nagachand as early as the 12th-13th centuries. Thus, the tradition and the inspiration to create a Ramayana in Oriya must have, in the greater fitness of things, come to Orissa from the South and Balarama Das has the credit of having chosen himself to be instrumental in an endeavour like this.

Moreover, Balarama Das's Oriya Ramayana has been ascertained as the earliest of all attempts to render the Sanskrit Ramayana into any regional language in the whole of north India. The Ramacharita Manasa of Tulsidas belongs to the last quarter of the sixteenth century, which makes it at least half a century younger than Balarama Das's Ramayana. In Marathi, Santh Eknatha's Bhabartha Ramayana was written in the sixteenth century also and Shridhara's Rama Vijaya or Ramayana was written in the second half of the seventeenth. Coming to Kabi Kruttibasa's Bengali Ramayana in Orissa's immediate neighbor-

hood to the north, this was also written in the later decades of the sixteenth century. It may be added that, according to an eminent scholar of Bengali literature, manuscript copies of the Bengali Ramayana bearing the name of Kruttibasa mostly belong to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and none is older than the end of the seventeenth.

Balarama Das's Jagamohana Ramayana is the oldest among the Ramayanas in Oriya, at least among those brought out in print till now. Mention can be made here of the Bichitra Ramayana by Siddheswar Das, thought to be no other person than Sarala Dasa, the writer of the Oriya Mahabharata belonging to the 15th century. It is said that this Bichitra Ramayana was one of the early writings of Sarala Dasa. Other scholars however have discussed the book from the philological point of view and concluded that the book was written at least two hundred years after Sarala Dasa. It is a matter of great surprise that this very book so much impressed the Telugu poets till about the eighteenth century that as many as five writers translated the same into Telugu in prose or verse. It ought to be said with regret that the original work has not yet seen the light and brought out in print. Needless to say that Balarama Das has inspired the entire bulk of Rama literature in Oriya language during the centuries following him. Except perhaps the poets of the Reeti period in Oriya literature when poetry-making was mainly architectural and ornamental in its scope and was thought it great to imitate the Kavyic canons of the Sanskrit Shastras. All Rama literature in Orissa has used the Jagamohana Ramayana as its base and frame of reference. It is true that lately there have been about half a dozen faithful translations of Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana into Oriya. But these have in no way put the Jagamohana Ramayana into shade, and as far the broad mass of the people are concerned, whose only delight in literature is derived from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagabata and other works in the same catagory, they understand Balarama Das's Jaga-

mohana Ramayana to be only Ramayana, just as every householder in the Hindi speaking regions of the country recognises Sant Tulsidas as the only Valmiki ever born on earth and his Ramcharitmanas as the only Ramayana available under the sky.

Balarama Das, in his versification of the Ramayana has used what is called the 'Dandi-Brutta' as the metre. The Dandi metre was also used by Sarala Dasa in his Mahabharata, Siddheswar Das's Bichitra Ramayana, mentioned before has also used the same metre. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata in Bengali, as also the many other translations of the various Sanskrit Puranas made from time to time into Oriya since Sarala Dasa have used the two line padas, each pada consisting of two lines of fourteen letters each. Even Achyutananda Das, a contemporary of Balarama and one of the Panchasakha has used the fourteen lettered double line padas in his Oriya translation of the Harivamsa. Another of the Panchasakha, Jagannatha Das, the writer of the Bhagabata in Oriya has of course followed the Nabakshari style, where a pada is composed of two lines, each line having nine-letters and the lines rhyming with their last letters. The Dandi Brutta is perhaps more in the form of a dialogue than of verse. The lines are not bound to have the same number of letters in each They may have eight, ten, twelve, fourteen or sometimes even more. But the end-letters of two consecutive lines in each couplet have to be the same, so that when one reads the lines aloud, giving the necessary sequential stresses as they come, one has the intonations of poetry being read.

Students of literature have various opinions based on a variety of inferences about the origin of this Dandi Brutta. But one thing appears to be unanimously agreed and that is that this particular Brutta used in two very prominent kavyas in Oriya has in it nothing to tag it with a Sanskritic origin. It has been suggested by a scholar of the Jagamohana Ramayana and its author that the Dandi Brutta has a folk origin. Works of literature and especially those

with a religious theme were sung and recited in those times rather than read. Prose dialogues were modified in course of time so that they could be recited with as much ease as any verse. Prose, specially conversational prose, used as a dialogue by the dramatic personae in the folklorish compositions of the early times, was actually expressed by the characters in a poetry-like vein ; and to make it sound more appropriate and drama-like, the lines in the conversation were made to end with the same letter. Much to the dialogue used in the yatras and folk-festival kathas which were in vogue in Orissa during that time and are also in vogue now in the little traditions of the people, sounds almost like Dandi-Brutta when it is sung or spoken aloud. It may be that both Sarala Dasa and Balarama Das have made use of this metre which they must have found ready at hand and which they thought would give their work an access right into the hearts of the people. Thus, to conclude and stress once more, Dandi Brutta was not borrowed from the Pundits or from the Kavyas they had written in Sanskrit. It was as if Sarala Dasa and Balarama Das had picked it up from the street, the Danda, from the very life of the people and used it in presenting to them two great works of the great tradition in their own language. This fact of the choice of the Dandi Brutta seems to be of so much significance in respect of the Jagamohana Ramayana that the work is more familiarly known as the Dandi Ramayana. Perhaps it has been called so right from the days of the author himself. Though Sarala Dasa's Mahabharata has also been written in the same metre, no one has ever had the idea of calling it Dandi Mahabharata.

Had Balarama Das chosen to be only a translator of the Sanskrit Ramayana, he would definitely not have the freedom to produce the highly creative work that his Oriya Ramayana is. Had he had the intention of only presenting Valmiki to the Oriya readers in translation, he would not have taken into himself the role of a fully equipped original poet to create a piece all his own. Balarama Das has used

the Valmiki Ramayana as far as the story part of the latter is concerned, and even there he has, almost with a design of his own, made new additions, omitted much and also brought in much, from what he could gather from local tradition, from folk-myths, from hearsays and at times, has even wooven out a few from his own mind. All this has gone to give the Jagamohana Ramayana a completeness —work on its own. One does not feel like missing anything at all of the basic Ramayana theme when reading the Jagamohana Ramayana, but what is more, one has the added delight that one is going through a beautiful creative work. It has to be remembered that Balarama has also taken freely from several other Sanskrit Puranas, from the Padma, Agni and Skanda Puranas, to name only a few. The poet has been very liberal, it seems, in borrowing themes from whatever source he has come across, perhaps to make what he was going to produce as complete a work as possible.

The Jagamohana Ramayana can be more appropriately called the Oriya Ramayana. In fact, when one uses the expression Oriya Ramayana, one is always understood to mean Balarama Das's Jagamohana Ramayana. As we have already noted, there have been about a dozen Ramayanas in Oriya depicting the saga of Rama and his deeds, written during different periods of Oriya literature and appearing in different shapes and garbs. But only Balarama Das's Ramayana has the single distinction of being called and understood as the Oriya Ramayana. It is therefore not so because the same has been written in the Oriya language, there is much more to it. The Jagamohana Ramayana is a creation in Oriya and all that this connotes. Only the broad purport of a theme has come from the traditional epic written long long ago in Sanskrit. The whole setting is Orissan and the general temper of the poetic appeal is also of Orissa. We can perhaps begin with the place-names used in the work. One wonders if the original poet Valmiki should have had any contact with the tract in the country

that came to be later known as Orissa. It is quite thinkable he did not perhaps know that such a region at all existed. Dandakaranya, partly in the present-day geographical Orissa, is the only place name mentioned in Valmiki's Ramayana that has any connection with Orissa. It is true, of course, that as the great epic began to occupy a hallowed place in the great tradition of India, many legends grew locally in Orissa in course of years and became associated with the names of different places here. Following Sarala Dasa, Balarama has made it almost a rule in his Ramayana to go out of the boundary of the first story to draw in to his work as much of Orissa of his times as possible.

It is no wonder then that the Jagamohana Ramayana presents before us, with all the poetic vigour it has to its glory, a socio-cultural history of the sixteenth century Orissa. Ajodhya has as it were withdrawn into temporary oblivion substituting Orissa in its place. When the unfortunate prince is wandering in the forests, these are the forests of Orissa. The hills, the rivers and the lakes are of Orissa. Even the seasons round the year come and go as in Orissa. Balarama Das has very carefully given a long list of flora and fauna as are found here at home. In the Aranyaka Kanda, Balarama Das's Rama takes his period of exile of fourteen years as an opportunity to visit the holy places of India and visits, among others, many of those situated in Orissa. He comes to the Chandrabhaga, the sacred river that flows into the sea in the vicinity of the Sun temple at Konark. He comes also to the Ekamra Tirtha, a name by which Bhubaneswar with its Shiva temple has been described in the Puranic lore. God Shiva, as sung in the Jagamohana Ramayana, has of course his own abode upon the mount Kailasa, but the mount is not situated in the heights of the Himalayas as told in the Sanskrit Ramayana, it is none else than the hill of Kapilasa of Orissa, in the district of Dhenkanal, that has a Shiva temple on its top since when no one knows and is frequented by pilgrims as a very holy place. The woods and the hilly tracts of

central and western Orissa are exactly the region that Balarama Das has made use of to tell us where the exiled three had wandered and found a retreat for themselves during the period of banishment. And if one is ready to believe, one is told that when Lord Rama went with his entourage to Lanka to fight it out with Ravana and rescue Sita, he actually enlisted the Adivasis of Orissa, then his neighbours, to constitute his army. And to climax the flight of imagination, the Ravana of Balarama Das's Ramayana when he practised the severe austerities to secure Lord Shiva's indulgence to grant him the desired boon, he chose no other place than Jaipur, the seat of Goddess Biraja, at the author's time, as it is now, a very well-known centre of Shakta worship. It should not be deduced from these flights of imagination, however, that Balarama Das really lacked the very rudimentary knowledge of geography and of distances between places. We should focus over alteration rather on this intention which was to give the great epic home to Orissa, to give it the utmost sense of proximity and familiarity. A bhakta with the elan of the poet in him could not do anything else. Thus it will not be very useful to look for history (except cultural history of Balarama's own time) and geography in the Jagamohana Ramayana, as many scholars have done with regard to the one written by Valmiki. We shall get the best from the Jagamohana if we come to it as a piece of literature, as poetry mirroring the life of its times. Sarala Dasa and Balarama Das were not historians or geographers ; by choice they were poets, souls enchanted.

The Ajodhya as depicted in the Jagamohana Ramayana is Orissa. The Rama, the hero of the great book seems to move and have his being as if he were somewhere here in Orissa, though the happenings depicted with him as the centre are adapted from the Sanskrit Ramayana by Valmiki. In the depiction of fight between Rama and Ravana and their opposing camps, the battlefield has all the marks of place somewhere in Orissa, the army using the

very arms and weapons used in Balarama's time by the soldiers of Orissa ; we have the same style of battle formations, almost the same rituals of confrontation preceding battle. One wonders what really inspired Balarama Das, primarily a Bhakta and a Sadhaka as he was, to summon the Rakshasas all the way from Lanka to Orissa to fight a battle with a prince of Ajodhya. Only a poet could attempt that, and successfully too, without bringing any unnaturalness into the description.

The costumes are from here, the dresses of the people playing the various roles are those of the contemporary Orissa. The ornaments women have on their bodies were never worn either in Lanka, Mithila or in Ajodhya. Even the food the people eat are as if they were homeserved from here. When Rama, after he came back home to Ajodhya after the great triumph, was feeding the whole capital to commemorate the occasion has recourse to the culinary skills then prevailing in Orissa. The festivals that are observed, whether in Ajodhya, Mithila or Kiskindhya, are festivals as observed in Orissa sometimes following the small details. In the Aranyaka Kanda, Balarama Das has taken care to give his readers the details of the style in which fortresses were built at that time in Orissa, how battle arrays were formed of the uniforms and other equipments worn by the soldiers when they marched out to fight a war.

And if we travel with Balarama Das to Mithila when King Janaka is giving his four princesses in marriage to the four princes from Ajodhya, we have the privilege of attending a ceremony not as it would have actually taken place in Mithila, but a marriage ceremony taking place at his time in Orissa. The minute details of rites and rituals observed here during a marriage have been faithfully described. The wedding robes, the home-coming with the bride after the marriage and also the night of the honeymoon all accord with usage in Orissa.

In the Sanskrit Ramayana of Valmiki the sage poet has sought to present to his readers the life and deeds of Rama

whom he thinks was the representative person per excellence of his time. In the Dandi Ramayana on the other hand, we have Rama, the Avatar of none less than God Himself which the author Balarama Das seeks to pressent before us. And therefore it is very interesting to see that Valmiki describes Rama in as many-splendoured a style as the life of any person could be, and never so much as an Avatar who descended on earth to fulfil some divine mission. In Balarama Das's Ramayana, Rama is at once an Avatar, a prince in distress, a king who is a servant of his people and has to rule a kingdom according to set conventions. He is also an ordinary man, moved by the ups and downs of his life, dismayed by adversities as any ordinary person could be. His life is not of the monolithic style that ordinarily a god upon earth is called upon to live, but is as full of variety as any ordinary human life could be.

Rama wails over his misfortune after the abduction of Sita by the king of Lanka and swears and curses his lot as any ordinary mortal could do. We have here the picture of a miserable husband whose wife has been taken away from him. He curses himself for his failure to give Sita the happiness that any wife naturally expects to get from her husband. When Sita should have stayed at Ajodhya as the envied first lady of the kingdom, she had to throw her lot with an exiled husband. Even in the forest she could not stay with him for the full term and was kidnapped by a Rakshasa with all evil intentions. It his misery Rama bemoans his lot and says that the Maker has really made him to be a man of no worth at all and that He should have rather created a tree instead of creating him! It would have at least served some purpose and been of some use by supplying fruit to the people. He questions the very utility of a person in this world, if he is unable to discharge his responsibilities towards his wife and his brother. Sorrow has reduced Rama, the incarnation of God to human in a state of great bereavement. Like any man in deprivation he angrily curses the Chakrabaka couple because they are so

absorbed in love-making that they cannot pay any attention when Rama asks them about the whereabouts of Sita.

It is interesting to see how Rama, Lakshmana and Sita try to improvise a home for themselves in the forest, as painstakingly as any group of persons so placed would do. Rama takes a sort of spade to dig a pit to do for a fireplace for their cooking. Lakshmana goes to the nearby fountain to fetch water. And he also makes a fire with the help of a piece of flint. At home in Ajodhya, Sita is an ideal housewife, worthy of husband who rules a kingdom and worthy of a dynastic tradition that she is a part of. After Rama was back in Ajodhya from Lanka and immediately after the coronation. Rama hosted a banquet to his entire army of the monkeys as well as to other distinguished invitees including several kings. To entertain them, the queen Sita has taken unto her the role of the hostess. Just as it is the pride of a real housewife in the villages of Orissa to cook for the guests herself and serve the food herself, Balarama describes Sita as doing the whole cooking with her own hands and serving food to the guests herself. After the guests had been entertained, she served food to her husband and also to other members of the family. Notwithstanding the lavish hospitality done courtesy demanded from the host some expression of humility and Balarama, makes Rama say, "We came back home after the exile only yesterday. We have not had the time to make proper arrangements and collect the quantity of materials necessary. You must have subjected yourselves to much inconvenience in coming here to oblige us. My apologies for all that."

Sita was, not only a queen, but also the consort of an Avatar. Yet Balarama Das does in the least forget and her role as the eldest daughter-in-law in a big joint family. After the male members had their meals to their satisfaction. Sita had to serve food to the mother-in-law, and then sat to eat herself with her three sisters, the three other daughters-in-law of the house. And it was now the turn of the mothers-in-law to attend on the daughters-in-law and

their affectionate attention could only be compared to that of the daughters-in-law towards the mothers-in-law. But, as in any joint family, the royal home at Ajodhya had its quanta of differences and quarrels, jealousies and bickerings and the reader of the Ramayana, used to such occurings in his own family, hardly ever feels embarrassed or surprised about it. As an example of a row in the royal household may be cited what followed Sita's expressing a desire to re-visit some hermitages in the forest with offerings of fruit and flowers to the rishis in their retreats. It was some time after the end of the exile and when after all her ordeals in Lanka and the agonising sequel, Sita was now the queen and yet she could be subjected to the bitterest invectives by the widow mother-in-law. According to Balarama Das, the seven hundred and fifty strong force of mothers-in-law of Sita rose in loud protest Sita's expressing a wish like this: "You are disobeying your mothers-in-law, disobeying your betters and elders. It seems you have lost all sense of shame and sanity because of your wanderings in the forest in the company of males." The vituperations grew more and more bitter: "Sita must be a woman of great cunning. Being the only wife of her husband, she has put Rama thoroughly under her spell. Rama cannot bear being away from her even for a moment. Moreover, now that she is carrying. She has become all the more arrogant." All this pother because Sita was unable to obtain Kaushalya's consent to her trip to the Rishis which had to be made inspite of the latter's disapproval.

The attitude of Balarama Das towards women as a whole seems to be an ambivalent one. He is high in praise for the women folk, for woman as the partner of man. The creator, according to Balarama Das has made woman combining in her the best elements of everything in the world. There is nectar upon her lips, moon on her face and cupid's arrows in her eyes. She is as full of commendable qualities inside as she is outside. Though referred to as the weaker sex, there is in fact no bound to her real strength. The other side of

Balarama's attitude towards woman, perhaps the general attitude towards her prevalent during the age, becomes apparent in what Balarama puts in the mouth of Lakshmana to console Rama when the latter had to banish Sita to the forest. If a woman brings ill repute to the family she thereby loses her right to be trusted, and in that case a man has to keep himself at a distance from her. Thus a woman can never be an object of absolute trust. When a woman chooses to be won over by the other side and becomes defect or, she does not hesitate to give out secrets causing great damage, even ruin. Needless to say, Balarama Das has in these places very easily betrayed himself into the kind of attitude shown by his contemporary male-obsessed society towards the other sex.

Balarama Das as he hailed from Puri itself and had known the place from his childhood, was certainly very well aware of the ways of the professional priests who earned their living by exploiting the innocent faith of pilgrims who came from far and near to worship in deities at Puri. The feature must have been as abominable then as it is even now. And the same must be true for most of our holy places, for that matter. During the days when Rama was wandering from place to place, he happened to have come also to Gaya, where people traditionally came, as they do even today, to offer Sraddha for the benefit of their forefathers who were dead. Rama also utilised this opportunity of a visit to Gaya for performing a Sraddha for the redemption of his predecessors in the family. And it took him no time to fall a victim to the greed of the Brahmins who had a monopoly of the institution of worship there. Without their help no Sraddha could be performed at Gaya. And after the rites were over, the Brahmins surrounded Rama and began clamouring for money. They would not let him go without making the expected payment. Rama, a wanderer that he was and thus did not have any money wanted to be exempted from it in consideration of his condition. But the Brahmins would not leave him at that. They said, "You are a prince and

belong to a royal family as far as we have information. So you must surely have money with you to spare for us or some other thing as its substitute. You must not try to escape like this as a miserly person." They wont be persuaded that the yajaman, Rama was really without money ; they thought he must be lying to evade payment in the holy place that Gaya was. Then their eyes fell on the ornaments Sita had on her body and pointing at them, they said that those could very well be offered to them, if only Rama had a desire to pay like other pilgrims did and did not want to run away without conduct properly at a holy place where he had come to offer Sraddha.

Rama explained that the ornaments Sita had on her body were not his, but belonged to Sita and thus it would be very unchivalrous of him and wrong to use them for a purpose which should be paid for only from his own earnings. He said it would give him no joy at all. Rama thought now the matter was over and began to set out on his way. But the priests would not give in so easily : they followed the three, threatening them with sticks and brick-bats and in a further attempt at coercion, even began pulling at the ochre clothes they were in. Rama would still not lose his temper and thought that the only thing that could be done was to make their own pace quicker, so that the priests would be compelled to give up following them. Goaded by their greed priests continued following them, Balarama Das says, for a few miles and as they lost all hope of getting anything from this unsubmitting pilgrim, in a last desparate attempt they caught hold of Sita. They tried to take the ornaments from her body by force. Balarama says, as if he were present at the scene, as many as four men had caught Sita by her clothes. Could outrage go further ? Sita was now crying aloud in great distress. Rama drew Sita closer to him and and reprimanded the greedy priests for such outrageous behaviour towards a lady. The priests would not leave Sita alone even then and continued insisting that they must get the ornaments in payment of their dues.

Rama protested, telling the priests that whatever the priests wanted to do, they should do it to the head of the family who was a male, and not behave so vulgarly with a woman and pester her like that. In her helplessness Sita clasped Rama's body with all her might and would not let Brahmins have their way and snatch away the ornaments. The situation now was that one end of Sita's sari which was on her body and in Rama's protection and the other end was in the hands of the unrelenting Brahmins. To take Sita out of the clutches of the Brahmins, the only course open to Rama was to ask Lakshmana to cut the sari at the middle into two with his sword. Lakshmana did as commanded. With half the sari on Sita's body, the scene was enough to provoke Lakshmana's anger and he was now ready to give Rama and Sita the protection of his bow and arrows. As the Brahmins wanted to repeat what they were till now doing, Lakshmana stopped them with the threat of his arrows. The greedy ones now look to other means, namely, vilification. They started shouting that two wicked persons with evil intentions were running away with beautiful young lady. They called the two brothers kidnappers who had stolen this lady from her home and were going to use her as their joint wife.

Thus they wanted to avenge their failure by slandering Rama and Lakshmana who, they said, had put on sannyasin's garb only to fool innocent people. Now only could Rama not hold his anger any more. He upbraided the priest, saying that those who could take recourse to such calumniting lies were no real Brahmins. He now did not spare his course to fall upon them who had behaved so lecherously as that and taken to lies as their last measure. He had no doubt that the Brahmins who took to the profession of priests at places of pilgrimage ceased to be Brahmins. His curse on them was that they would always remain poor and would be forced to live from hand to mouth. They would take to begging even when they had enough stored at home. Moreover, in the course of

their degeneration, the Brahmins will begin to give up their calling as Brahmins and take to trade, reducing themselves to the state of Vaishyas. They will have no scruples about selling their own children for money.

Why should Balarama Das take so much pains to compare this diatribe against the Brah ins, and put it in the mouth of one whom he introduced in his Ramayana as the incarnation of God ? The Indian caste society had then just started to degenerate into a more hierarchy of disorder, though conventionally still called an order. The highest castes had begun to betray their hollowness by disregarding their duties as leaders and law-givers of group-life. The priest had turned the temples into thieves' dens, aud royal favour came to be reserved for sycophants. These, for reasons of personal gain and love of lucre, had tried and succeeded in making people, the innoecnt as well as the sophisticated, believe that an earthly ruler had always had God and Dharma on his side. The ruler of the uuiverse was said to be as dependent upon the rulers of men for the upkeep of Dharma and all that goes in its name. Balarama Das, in his Ramayana, has minced no words in exposing these misleaders of men. He says that the Brahmins in the court were, as a rule, all masters in the art of flattery. They blindly approved whatever the king did, which was very profitable for their own pockets. In a conversation of Bibhisana with Rama, Balarama repeatedly reminds that it was a disgrace to be born as a Brahmin in the Kali era. Such Brahmins follow no rules of abstinence nor any code of conduct in life. These Brahmins have always ill-will for their fellow-creatures and became notorious for all sorts of serious violations of morality. Thus, concludes Balarama, there is no doubt that in the wake of their evil deeds, the Brahmins are sure to end in hell.

It is clear that Rama and his party must have been greatly pained by what they had to experience at Gaya. It is said they had almost the same kind of situation to

encounter at Varanasi. After that, Balarama Das, so full of sympathy for the aggrieved three, brings them down to Orissa, to Chandrabhaga by the sea, near the temple of Konark. They take a holy bath in the river, install several Shivas and Shaktis in the temples in the neighbourhood and worship at these shrines. Then they come to Puri to offer to the trinity installed in the famouse temple. Here Balarama Das used this oppertunity to sing of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita as Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra, the presiding deities in the temple. He does what all the Sadhaka poets of Orissa have done through the centuries—both before him and after him. Whatever the conception of the deity, of God who is primordially without name or shape, the Sadhakas of Orissa have adopted that with an unquestioning faith and adoration, have identified it with the institution of Jagannatha and have felt elevated and enriched by doing so. Balarama and the Panchasakha as a group have been only one of the instances in point. This easily explains why Balarama comes backs to Jagannatha time and again to sing His praise and that Shrikshetra Puri, almost in every chapter of the Ramayana.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Balarama Das's Oriya Ramayana is in no respect a faithful rendering of Valmiki's Sanskrt Ramayana. The Sanskrit Ramayana belongs to the great tradition of India as a cultural legacy. This has been the source inspiration for almost all the Ramayanas. Ramakathās as well as Ramakāvyas, ever written in the various other Indian languages. The Ramayanas, written in the regional languages have never been just translations since they have incorporated a great deal of the little traditions reflecting regional cultures. The matrix has of course always remained the great tradition. In the Jagamohan Ramayana also Balarama Das first and foremost as a poet in his own right and not as a translator of theme of the great tradition. The omissions and the interpolations together create the impression of an original

work and show how a borrowed thema can be made to stand on its own by poetic power. The omissions and interpolations are never chance ones, but are to a very great extent determined by special attitude of the poet, by the emphasis he gives to the various life-values and his uniqueness of vision. Much should also depend upon the millieu in which a poet happens to have developed himself as poet, upon the most significant challenges of the time and so on. One could make a long, exhaustive list of the variations and the interpolations to fill pages. The mythologising tendency, common to all poets of the medieval times, markedly influenced their style, and Balarama Das has been no exception. Apart from the episodic variations Balarama's Ramayana has borrowed a lot of folk element that has gone a long way to make the epic story into folk poetry, as it were. Kings and queens have become fathers and mothers with all their small beauties and imperfections as in real life; gods forget for a while that they are here on a divine mission and behave like just ordinary people in life. It is at places like these that the poet gets the upper hand over the mere narrator.

Balarama Das tells us how, when Ravana was carrying away Sita in his chariot and had to fight the bird Jatayu who came to obstruct him, she took a chance to escape, stealthily getting out of the chariot and taking cover in the forest. Ravana, so long as he was busy fighting with the bird, was not aware of this and only when he had finished with the bird, and returned to the chariot then he discovered that Sita was not there. Of course, it did not take him long to detect the excapee and bring her back into the chariot. It seems Balarama did not relish the picture of a Sita reduced to helpless inaction in the face of danger. He thought he could give a better picture of Sita by providing evidence of some boldness in her character. Perhaps Balarama did not like to see any woman so helpless as Sita was in the hands of Ravana, and hence this variation from

the story as told by Valmiki. Another story that is not found in the original Sanskrit version of the Ramayana but is almost legendary in Orissa folklore is that of the good-natured squirrel that wanted to contribute its mite, however insignificant, in the great task of constructing the sea-bridge to Lanka. Rama's followers, giant monkeys and others were carrying whole boulders for the construction of the bridge. Everybody was at his best and doing his utmost. The sight inspired the squirrel to try do his bit and help the noble mission. And if there was a will, there must be a way also. This was how he proceeded: he first took a dip in to the sea and got himself drenched; then he came out of the water and rolled on the dry sand of the beach. The few particles of sand that stuck to his body, he then shook off on the bridge which was being built on such a huge scale. This manoeuvre the squirrel went on repeating again and again. It caught the notice of Rama who was drawn in great affection towards the squirrel. He took the squirrel palm of his hand and moved the fingers of his other hand on his back, patting it in thankful approbation of the squirrel's will to help. Since then, according to popular belief, all squirrels have borne the marks of Rama's fingers on their back, as a precious memory of what one of the species did to help the prince of Ajodhya in his hour of need.

Balarama Das of the Jagamohan Ramayan excels more as a poet than as a narrator of the Ramayana story in Oriya. He excels himself when he brings down gods to earth, imbues them with human emotions and makes us feel the very warmth of their movements in life. To give only one example, when Rama looks at his brother Lakshmana, unconscious and seemingly dead after he has been hit by a most powerful weapon of the Rakshasa, he is unable to contain himself and gives vent to the anguish of a human heart in utter distress. He cries in lamention: "Usually in our world, a brother is there to take a share of one's property. But this poor brother of mine, it seems,

had accompanied me to the forest to take a share in my sufferings."

Balarama was a householder and a man of renunciation at the same time. The Panchasakha order he was a part of recognised both the dharmas : the dharma of the householder as well as that of the man of renunciation. .Thus the Panchasakha were never world-forsakers. The so-described Nirguna Sadhakas were perhaps no where world-forsakers. They thought of the world also as full of God's essence, as interpanetrated with the Presence. That made sacred many things that were regarded by those of the world-renouncing way as profane or evan as sinful, World-and life negation was not the style of the Nirguna Sadhakas. In the Panchasakha literature, including that written by Balarama, we have a powerful affirmation of the world, with an appeal for remaking it in the aspired-for image than running away from it as if it inevitably led to man's fall.

After the Sanskrit work Mahanataka, ascribed to Hanumana. Balarama has called his Jagamohana Ramayana as Mahanataka. The former, as the latter, has Ramayana as the central theme. Mahanataka can also allegorically mean the great drama that life itself is and thus suggests to the idea of an epic. Balarama's Ramayana will in many respects be preserved as a book of life, where through the medium of a well-known story we are led into an acquaintance with life in its entirety as it was being lived in Balarama's time. Like the Mahabharata of Sarala Das and Shrimadbhagabata of Jagannatha Das, Balarama's Dandi Ramayana is still very near to the heart of the people who speak and have their being in the Oriya language. In view of the fact that Balarama had completed his Ramayana when he was a little over thirty one is only astounded at the great creative comprehensiveness which he could command at such a young age. But following the tradition of his age, Balarama in all humility claims no credit for himself but all the credit to the Lord Jagannatha, only through whose grace the great achievement was possible.

In his own words: "This work of mine, depicting the story of Ramayana is called the Jgamohana Ramayana, and the poet of this great work is Shri Jagannatha Himself. He was always present there in my heart as I was writing: He was indeed describing his own story Himself. I have been just an instrument all through. As it is possible for a white genuine specimen of serpent comes out of the pit of a mouse, so has the great work of Ramayana comes out of my mouth in the form of these verses."

CHAPTER IV

OTHER WORKS OF THE SADHAKA POET

Balarama Das, and the Panchasakha as a group far that matter were never cultists. They were never, in a narrow sense attached to any cult. Each of them, of course, had a way of his own, which they followed in their path of aspiration, of realisation and of worship. But they also believed, as a part of their faith, that there was not one path only but that inward sincerity and genuineness of inquiry were what mattered, and would give results, whatever particular way one followed. Orissa for many centuries has been a meeting place of many ways of worship and of many ways of looking at life and its values, and as Sadhakas, the Panchasakha were heirs to that legacy and that tradition. Rejection was never their way of dealing with thing. They were synthesizers by temperament and by training as it were. They laid stress upon the Sadhaka's earnestness as an aspirant and the genuineness of his efforts to reach the depths. The choice of this or that way was of secondary importance not unimportant, but less important than the preparation of an aspirant with a real attitude and willingness to go the way he has chosen.

Thus, what the Panchasakha wrote and wanted to leave for posterity was in no way a cultist literature. For them, everything that helped an aspirant for better preparation on the path of greater enlightement was spiritual literature. Thus they freely put their efforts in producing creative literature that could encourage people to take to away of sadhana to come back to the essentials and instead of quarrelling over small differences, to recognise and appreciate one another's path and efforts, and above all to

emphasise the element of sincerity, irrespective of the pattern one adopts for oneself. For them, Yoga, Tantra, the way of the perfection of body, the Vaishnava way of devotion were not mutually exclusive paths to bring discord among aspirants. They took Vedanta as the pivot round which the whole gamut of Indian spiritual wisdom revolved. And to crown all, there was Lord Jagannatha, an institution and never a cult, who did not prescribe any particular way of Sadhana as the only way, declaring other ways as heresies, but who presided over all Sadhana undertaken by all Sadhakas, notwithstanding the variety of paths adopted by then. Hence the rich variety of literature produced by each of the Panchasakha. They have, to start with, translated the sacred epics and many Puranas from the original Sanskrit to Oriya, they have written treatises on Yoga, on the kundalini way to realisation, on equality of right in respect of Sadhana on the Vaishnava way to spiritual aspiration as the main prop. They have written books specially meant for sections of the society, that were traditionally backward and low in the social ladder. In some of their books, they have spoken openly against the caste system and flouted it in a very special manner of their own. They have made speculations about the shape of things to come, especially if people still went their old ways and were resistant to change. They perhaps hoped that if people were told of the dreadful consequences awaiting them if they stuck to their sinful ways, they might be awakened to a better sense of duty and the need of reform in their corporate life. And in all these that they wrote. Jagannatha was the all-presiding deity, the symbol that always inspired. Jagannath was the source of all real inspiration, Jagannatha was invoked to be on one's side as one chose to go the path of Sadhana, and also, Jagannatha was the summum bonum and the culmination to which all Sadhana was directed.

To come to the works of Balarama Das, we can begin with the translations. As already discussed in the prece-

ding chapter were not really translations or faithful reproductions of the original in another language, they were full-fledged creations and read like real originals, speaking so much for the rich creative genius of the poet. We have already discussed at length Balarama Das's Jagamohana Ramayana and examined the many aspects of this great work. Next in the category is his translation of the Shrimad Bhagavadgita. As in the case of the Ramayana, the Bhagavadgita of Balarama is not simply a work of translation into Oriya of the original in Sanskrit. The versification has not been made in the Dandi metre as in the case of the Ramayana, but Balarama Das has chosen different ragas in the translation of the different chapters. This gives us an idea of the various ragas then prevalent in the area ; and they are mostly adaptions or modifications of the ragas of Karnataka music.

In this beautiful piece of work, Balarama has hailed Bhagavadgita as the fifth Veda. He also has described the Gita as the cream in the vast poet full of milk that is the Mahabharata. And to remian faithful to his own special attitude, Balarama has made the charioteer Shrikrishna interchangeable with Jagannatha. And the introductory story is the same as in the Sanskrit Mahabharata and in the Oriya Mahabharatas. When the two opposing armies were in full battle formation ready for fight. Yudhisthira, the eldest of the Pandavas, put aside his bow and arrowng, alighted from his chariot and with folded hands entered the lines of the Kauravas. The rest of the Pandava brothers along with Krshna followed him what with surprise and what with an intention of protecting him in the event of any danger from the enemy side. The onlooking soldiers and others on either side thinking that Yudhisthira was out to acknowledege defeat even before the Pandavas' joined the battle, were loud in their condemnation of the cowardly move. Yudhisthra proceeded straight to Bhishma, paid respects to him in the usual manner and asked for his blessings in the fight. He did the same thing with Drona,

Krupacharya and Aswatthama, one after the other and got their blessings. People who had misunderstood Yudhisthira's gesture before now realised its true significance and were all praise for Yudhisthira and the calmness and patience that he personified. They blessed the mother who had given birth to such a son, one who could maintain such an attitude of gentleness and goodwill even on the verge of actual fighting.

We have already discussed in the first chapter, the occasion that led to the Oriya rendering of the Shrimad Bhagavadgita by Balarama Das. It is intersting to note the author's one departure from the original right at the beginning of the book, in that he makes Vyasadeva, the author of the Mahabharata himself, go to king Dhrutarastra and invite him to witness the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. After this one departure, Balarama has followed the descriptions of the original Mahabharata.

The most important thing to be remembered about Balarama Das's translation of the Bhagavadgita is the clue it gives us to evolution of many Oriya words, and in general, to the breaking up of Sanskrit words into Oriya. The process had started in the Oriya language definitely quite some centuries before Balarama Das, but Balarama was with Sarala Dasa among the very pioneers to pick up these fragments from the spoken language by coining new words from Sanskrit, besides having made use of the many *tadbhava* words then in vogue in the speech of the people. It may be submitted that this great experiment was discontinued in the next centuries when in the age of ornamental poetry with its subservience to the orthodox rules of Sanskrit poetics, there was great enthusiasm to Sanskritize the Oriya language. There was something like a eeremonial call to march back to Sanskrit vocabulary and pundits rather than poets had their day. This happened almost simultaneously and perhaps was as an indirect result of extreme institutionalisation of religious life. Literature also became more and more formalised and a privilege of the patronised pundits

in the courts of kings. It was only since the beginning of the twentieth century that poets and writers again felt the need of going to the living store-house of the spoken language and avoided the Sanskrit words in favour of easier equivalents already current in popular speech.

Next among the works of Balarama Das to be mentioned is his Lakshmi Purana. Worship of goddess Lakshmi has been in vogue in Orissa since how long back no one knows. The special time for this worship is during the harvest months, in the first phase of the winter season. Lakshmi for every householder and housewife in Orissa, is also the consort of Vishnu, and so, of course, the consort and and companion of Jagannatha in the temple. According to the story given in the Lakshmi Purana, once during the season of Lakshmi worship the goddess sought her husband Jagannatha's permission to leave the temple and to go round the place and see for herself with how much sanctity and purity of heart of people worshipped her. The permission was given and then the two brothers. Jagannatha and Balarama, thought that as there would be no cooking at home, it would be better for them also to spend the day outside. Thus they all went out of the temple on a Thursday morning. Lakshmi without knowing that the two brothers had also come out.

Goddess Lakshmi took the guise of an old Brahmin lady and first went to visit the rich families, like those of the well-to-do merchants, the high priests of the temple etc. She was greatly disappointed at what she saw. People were fast asleep in their beds and there was so much filth lying on all sides, what to speak of arrangements for the worship of Goddess Lakshmi. Thus disappointed, Lakshmi came then to the outskirts of the city where people of low castes lived in simple hut without anything worth showing as a home. To her utter surprise she saw Shriya, a lady of a Chandala family, who had already taken her bath very early in the morning, had washed the floor and courtyard of her home clean and was making

preparations for the worship of Lakshmi. Before the door leading into the hut she had drawn so neatly a decoration pattern of foot-prints inviting Lakshmi's steps on them when the Goddess came to accept the puja, Very much pleased to see all this, Lakshmi decided to go in, and the little hut in no time was transformed into a palace by her presence. She thought she had never had such experience before.

Just at that moment the two brothers, Jagannatha and Balarama, also chanced to be passing by that way. They were near dismayed to find the mistress of their home in the house of a Chandala, one belonging to the lowest of castes. Balarama lost his temper in no time and beg to castigate his brother in these words : "Now you can see with your own eyes how your wife conducts herself. She has, of all houses, chosen a Chandala's house for her seat. Who knows what other lowly places she may be frequenting following her whim ? One can well imagine, she will take no bath after this and enter the temple again, making all of us share in the sin ? She has perhaps been doing this daily, we brothers being kept in the dark all the time." Jagannatha at first took courage to do some pleading for his wife but the furious Balarama would not listen. The brothers then went back to the temple and resolved that they would from that day lead a cleaner life and do without Lakshmi.

At the day's end when Lakshmi returned to the temple she found none other than Jagannatha, her husband himself, at the door barring her ways. Jagannatha, in obedience to the elder brother's orders, said he would not let her in because of her having visited all sorts of dirty and low people. Lakshmi protested and tried to convince him that the accusation was not at all fair. She said that it was never a crime to visit the home of a Chandala. As mother to all creatures she could never permit herself such discrimination. But Jagannatha, the faithful carrier of an order, said that this was not the only complaint against her, there were many other long-standing complaints against

her. "There is no woman in the world who is more fallen than you; the people of the world rightly call you a wandering goddess because you actually keep wandering from house to house, though, being my wife, you ought to stay with me in mine. You bring disruption to a thousand homes in order to see only one household grow wealthy and prosperous. You are also an expert in splitting households. These are only a few from the long list of your notorious doings. So you will now do well to get out and never have a desire to enter here again." Lakshmi was not one to be daunted at these accusations. She retorted with candour that Jagannatha was only showing his weakness by going to disown his own wife at the behest of his elder brother who had succeeded in making him believe in certain lies. In an honourable gesture, she gave back to Jagannatha all the ornaments she had on her body and left.

She went to live outside the city in a place which was built for her instantaneously by Viswakarma and then began to work out her designs to teach the two brothers a lesson. With the help of the Vetalas at her command, she carried away secretly all food and wealth from the temple. As Balarama Das has put it, Lakshmi had decided to do all this because she thought she had a duty here to play the role of a leader of all women in the world. The poet has put these words in her mouth: "If the Lord neglects me and can drive me, his wife, away like this, the menfolk in the world will also follow suit and behave with their wives in this manner. If the Lord Himself will abandon me and have another household without me, all the men in the world will also begin to copy Him and do as He did."

Next day, when the abandoned two brothers got up from bed, they found the entire temple empty. They went to the kitchen feeling hungry. There was absolutely no food to be found there. When they could not bear the pangs of hunger any more, they went out of the temple in the guise of Brahmins begging food from door to door, but just like ordinary stray beggars, were turned away from every door

without getting anything. After all these bitter experiences, they came to the new palatial building outside the city and were given food and otherewise made welcome. They discovered that everything they received in this house was exactly like what they used to have when Lakshmi in the temple. They now realised who their hostess was. They were repentent for their momentary lapse of good sense and the wrong they had done to Lakshmi in asking her to leave the temple. They entreated her to come back to the temple. Lakshmi agreed to comply on two conditions First, there should be no restriction on her freedom to go to anyone's house without any distinction of caste, denomination or creed. The second condition was that from that day on whatever she cooked in the temple should be available to all, irrespective of caste and creed. All, from Brahmin to Chandala, were to be allowed to take that food together and from each other's hand or even mouth within the temple premises without incurring any impropriety.

This has been the practice since then in the temple of Jagannatha at Puri.

Among the other Puranas that have been traced out so far and ascribed to Balarama Das are Chandi Purana, Brahma Purana and Kurala Purana. These too, as in the case of the other translations from the original Sanskrit are not simply translations but are as good as original creations. Apart from the translations of the Shrimadvagavadgita, the other Oriya Gitas Balarama has to his credit are : Brahma Gita, Arjuna Gita, Gajanistarana Gita, Amarakosa Gita, Vedantasara Gupta Gita, Jnana Ujjwalamani Gita, Chhatisa Gita, Garuda Gita, Pralamba Gita, Namaratna Gita, Birata Gita, Diptisara Gita and the Gita Sara. Among the other books of his, now available, could be named Krushna Lila, Rasa Keli, Rama Bibha, Kanta Koili, Kamala Lochana Chautisa, Baramasi, Mruguni Stuti, Durga Stuti, Bhaba Samudra, Bhakti-Rasa-mrta Sindhu, Sabha Binoda, Saptanga Yogasana Tika, Brahmanda Bhugola, Sharira

Bhugola, Vedha Parikrama, Ganesha Bibhuti, Bata Abakasha, Jnana Chudamani, Baula Adhyaya, Brahmajnana Ekakshara and Siddhanta Dambara. There is also the Eka-Adhyaya Mahabharata going in his name. As regards the number and variety of works by Balarama Das, we have to take them with a grain of salt in view of the authorship traditions in the middle ages. According to one view, there was not one Balaram Das, but two, perhaps three. The acheivements of the leaders of spiritual movements were habitually overstated by their followers and disciples. For example, in the case of Achyutananda Das, another prominent figure in the Panchasakha constellation, the authorship of a thousand books has been attirbuted to him. The statement has, with so much genuine devotion, been put in the mouth of Achyutananda himself in one of his books. This should be understood to mean great many and not one thousand literally. Sometimes the disciples who came after a great leader had a desire to have their works known not under their own names but under the name of their guru and so they used the Guru's name in stead of their own. In India, this tradition lasted for many centuries, till recent times. Conversely, sometimes the gurus would let their books circulate in the names of their disciples. As they attributed all authorship to none else than God, the supreme guru, it did not matter in whose name a particular piece of work was allowed to see the light.

Space will not allow discussion of all the books written by Balarama Das here. We can only notice here the comparatively outstanding ones, those that reflect some definite aspects of Balarama Das's creative vitality and link him with certain spiritual traditions he seems to have assimilated in his own making as a Sadhaka. These are quite a few.

GUPTA GITA : This is a treatise in verse on the salient points of Jnana Yoga, set forth in eight very small chapters. The whole theme has been dealt with in the form of a

dialogue between Shri Krshna and Arjuna, the latter asking questions and the former clarifying the doubts. It describes all the six chakras and their locations in the body, and sings of Brahma as the Mahashunya. It also, in an exalted sort of vision, speaks of Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshana—the wheel standing for the four vedas as for four different parts, the eyes, the ears, the lips and the nose respectively, of the human body. In another place in this book, Balarama Das symbolically identifies the various parts of the body with various place-names and famous temples situated in Orissa.

AMARAKOSA GITA : This book gives an account of the genesis, of how the Immaculate Creator was moved to create and the five elements were created. It speaks of the inter-relative aspects of Pinda and the Brahmanda of the Jeeva and the Parama. It then goes on to describe the various kinds of Bhakti, the six chakras and the ultimate summum bonum of life. In a sort of digression, Balarama Das seeks to tell us that the five Pandava brothers of the Dwapara era are still living incognito at Puri and mentions five places.

VEDANTASARA GUPTA GITA : As already indicated, this book was born out of the challenge thrown by the king and the pundits to Balarama to elucidate the subtle theories of Vedanta, and the latter's successfully meeting the challenge. The book explains that to know oneself is to know God, and in order to know and realise oneself one has to take to the path of Yoga. He who sees God in the temple that the body is, is the real Bhakta. True knowledge is the realisation that the entire universe or Brahmanda is also in the Pinda. And this self-knowledge when realised is the supreme Bliss.

BRAHMANDA BHUGOLA : One of the fellow-Panchasakhas, Jagannatha Das, was the writer of the Oriya Shrimad-bhagabata, a book that occupies as high a place in Oriya literature as Balarama's Oriya Ramayana. It is said

that, while both of them were staying at Puri, Balarama used to listen to the expositions of the Bhagavata by Jagannatha Das. They were friends, both of them great students of religious literature and Sadhakas as well as Bhaktas. Brahmanda Bhugola can be said to be a further commentary on the various padas of Jagannatha Das's Oriya Bhagavata. The book has as many as eighty-four adhyayas and in the beginning of each adhyaya Arjuna takes out a pada from the Oriya Bhagavata and calls upon Shri Krshna to explain it to him, and Krshna goes on complying with his request. These explanations have been written in the same versestyle of two padas with nine letters in each pada, as Jagannatha Das's Oriya Bhagavata. By the power of his imagination Baḷarama pictures the Bhagavata as Brahmanda or the universe itself and makes an attempt to map it out in elucidatory detail. This was why he has named the work as Brahmanda Bhugola.

To write a philosophical commentary on the work of a contemporary poet is almost a unique exercise of its kind. It may however be mentioned that Jagannath Das himself had written such a book, the "Artha Koili", which was a philosophical commentary on Markanda Das "Keshaba Koili". But Markanda Das was not a contemporary of Jagannatha Das, but definitely preceded him.

BATA ABAKASA AND BHABA SAMUDRA : These two works have already been referred to in the first chapter of this book. They depict two episodes in the poet's life and speak of the personal relationship with God which a bhakta would cherish as the greatest boon in life. The stories may not be literally true, but they truthfully depict the attitude of a true bhakta for whom God is the last resort and refuge and who believes that it is He who will get him ultimately over all dangers and discomfitures. We are frmiliar with autobiographical poems of this kind in the cases of almost all bhaktas who happen to be poets also, who do not sing their own praise but sing only of the grace and glory of the God who protects.

SAPTANGA YOGASANA TIKA : In this book Mallikanatha, the disciple and initiate asks questions of Gorakhanath, guru and the latter enlightens him with answers. The theme is Yoga and the know-how of making the body vehicle of god-realisation. The yoga, as prescribed is dealt within its seven techniques to be followed with all earnestness if one has to attain the highest goal. Needless to say, this Yoga had in the tradition of Orissa, as a part of the great tradition. Some of the Siddhas who according to scholars had gone to Tibet and left the famous Charyapadas as a part of their legacy, were definitely from the region which later came to be known as the Oriya language area. Kahnupa, Lohi Das and Sarahapa are some of the names. These Siddhas had left a tradition of kaya sadhana, which survived as a distinct way even to the middle ages. Those who took to the Yogic way had to reckon with the tradition and it was accepted in the country's spiritual tradition in general as one of the ways. One of Balarama's other books, the 'Sharira Bhugola' is also another attempt with the same aim in view, namely to enlighten people about the Gorakhanath tradition and to attract them towards that path.

MRUGUNI STUTI AND THE GAJANISTARANA GITA are two books of simple Oriya poetry, telling two well-known stories of bhakti in the old tradition. One story is of the mother-stag who was surrounded by danger from all sides. She called up God to get her out of the predicament and was ultimately saved by the miracle of god-sent storm, rain and serpent. Likewise, in the story of the crocodile and the elephant, the elephant is rescued by God killing the crocodile with his chakra. The story is so popular that several places are shown as the scene of the elephant's encounter with the crocodile. The story is told with great pathos and wealth of imagery in all regional bhakti literatures.

The few other books, like Krushna Lila, Rasa Keli and Durga Stuti were meant for popular consumption. Kanta Koili and the Baramasi occupy very distinctive

places in the rich Koili literature of Orissa. The latter is perhaps the earliest among the specimens of literary writing in the Oriya language. May be, they were at first not in written form but were sung from mouth to mouth. Who composed them were generally not known. Balarama Das, like many before and after him, used this medium of communication through poetry to introduce himself as a bhakta and as a poet to the people. The Vedha Parikrama is a descriptive catalogue in verse of various gods and goddesses who were installed in the many minor temples around the great temple of Lord Jagannatha. The author acquaint the reader with the routine of rituals and cycles of worship practised in these many temples.

Among the manuscripts that have been discovered, students of Balarama Das have traced out Jnana Chudamani written in prose and Brahma Gita written partly in prose and partly in verse. To be more precise, the real text of the latter book is in verse and the notes that are interspersed in between text is in prose. A few decades back the Archaeological Survey of India excavating in the then feudatory state of Mayurbhanja, in North Orissa, referred to two books by Balarama Das, the Pralamba Gita and the Siddhanta Dambara. But so far manuscripts of no such books have been discovered anywhere by any scholar. The Ganesha Bibhuti is another of Balarama Das's prose-cum-verse works. Oriya written prose had not attained a developed state when Balarama Das was on the literary scene. Prose was only another name for the spoken language and the written word more often than not meant poetry. Besides, whenever one had to sing of God, or write discourse on path to God or God realisation, it could be done as a rule only through the medium of poetry. Balarama Das was surely one of the few pioneers who had dared and interpolated prose into poetry and that too, religious poetry. Thus the prose pieces or mixed pieces of Balarama Das have much significance from a philological point of view and students of the evolution of

the Oriya language can find in him interesting clues to how particular words broke away from the Sanskrit original to appear in Oriya. Especially interesting are the verb forms as they have made a gradual departure from the Sanskrit forms to become a part of the Bhasa. Detailed serious study yet remains to be done of this morphosis through its various phases in the history of the Oriya language.

The Eka-Adhyaya Mahabharata as the very name of it suggests, is a unique feat of composition in itself. Let it be remembered that Balarama Das devoted as he himself said, not less than a hundred thousand couplets to complete his Jagamohana Ramayana. Nearly a century before him, Sarala Das had written the voluminous Oriya Mahabharata. One wonders who inspired Balarama Das to take upon himself the task of writing the one-chapter Mahabharata, in 185 verses only. It was in the tradition of the *hastāmalaka* found in Sanskrit religious literature. The 185 verse abridgement by Balarama will be found useful by those who have no time to go through the full bulk of Sarala Dasa's great work.

Apart from the big and small works referred to and discussed in brief above and ascribed to Balarama Das, there are a few others which, some suppose, were written also by Balarama Das. Works falling under this category are the Nilasundara Gita, the Kali Bharata, Bauladhyaya, etc. The heterogenous character of the themes of these works has sometimes led scholars to believe that there must have been more than one Balarama Das in the Oriya literature of the middle ages Some would plead that there ought to be at least two Balarama Dases—one, the writer of the characteristic Vaishnava books and the other, the author of the works dealing with Yoga and Nirguna. About the Gupta Gita, it has been said that Balarama Das had composed only the first chapter of the book and the remaining chapters were added long after him by another Sadhaka and writer of the same name. In the Vaishnava

literature depicting Shri Chaitanya's life and times and written in Bengali there is mention of a 'Matta' Balarama Das, whom some would identify with the Balarama of the Panchasakha group, while others take him to be some other person. Some contemporary manuscripts since available would lend support to the former view.

A more serious difficulty arises when we begin to think schematizingly and assume that a writer and poet, should he write on religious themes, ought normally to keep himself confined to the ideology of one particular denomination. But the Panchasakha, Balarama Das included, were never bound by this rule. Because they have written all kinds of things in the garb of religious poetry. What was Balarama Das actually then ? Was he Vaishnava, as the term is commonly and often superficially understood ? Was he a Buddhist, because he, like his contemporaries, identifies Buddha with Shri Jagannatha ? Was his writing motivated to propagate the practices of Yoga and Tantra ? If he was one and not any of the others, then how could he bring together so much variety in his books ? There is no doubt that Balarama Das was the most famous and the most respected among the Panchasakha. though two others in the group, Jagannatha Das and Achyutananda Das also rose to great heights in Sadhana like Balarama. The pre-eminence of Balarama might be due to his being the eldest among them. He was senior in age even to the great Chaitanya, around whom the religious life of Puri seemed to revolve for quite a number of years. In what great esteem Balarama was held can be inferred from the fact that in a later century Pitambara Das, who wrote the Nrusingha Purana in Oriya, claimed that he had been born as Balarama Das in his third previous birth.

We may conclude that Balarama did not belong to exclusively this or that fold. He was a bhakta. And for a true bhakta it never is a problem to achieve genuine spiritual integrity and to assimilate whatever is essential in the movements around him. The Panchasakha were such bhaktas.

CHAPTER V

THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE COURT VAISHNAVAS

BY THE term Vaishnava should be meant a person who is a devotee of Vishnu, who believes in God's presence everywhere, and for whom the whole world is His abode. Any person with a genuine attitude of devotion and selflessness ought to be called a Vaishnava. But historically it has not been so. There have been various paths and cults in the name of Vishnu. Points of subtle difference and shifts of emphasis have given rise to contending philosophical schools. Vishnu has remained all along the object of adoration no doubt, but the path supposed to lead to Him has been strewn with various denominations and orders that have brought so much disorder and discord in man's God-seeking and God-worshipping.

Lord Jagannatha of Puri has been worshipped through the ages as the Suprme Deity representing Vishnu and His worshippers have called themselves Vaishnavas. Even the queens of a dynasty that long preceded the Gangas and the Kesharies in Orissa declared themselves as *paramavaishnavis* which became a part of there title. And prior that an inscription of Kharavela of the first century A. D. points to the prevalence of Krushna worship at that time. As we noticed before, Orissa had long been in communication with waves of Vaishnava movement from the South, and with great Vaishnava scholar and saints like Ramanuja, Madhwa and others all of had their impact with their respective denominational centers, and followers.

Therefore, when Shri Chaitanya came to Orissa and landed at Puri at about the beginning of the 15th century,

he came to what was already a famous place on the map of Vishnu-worship and Vaishnavism. It is true the cult which bore his particular impress did come as a new wave to Orissa which tried to engulf everything within its fold in one sweep as it were, but it should not be understood that it was Shri Chaitanya who brought Vaishnavism to Orissa or that the only Vaishnavism that swept Orissa during his pilgrimage to and stay in Orissa was of the Gaudiya variety.

One important fact to be borne in this connection is that Shri Chaitanya converted the then king of Orissa. Prataparudra Deva to his way of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, that by and by became the official pattern of the Vaishnava movement in general and flourished as court Vaishnavism. According to some literature written in those times king Prataparudra was commanded by Lord Jagannatha Himself to get initiated into Vaishnavism from Shri Chaitanya. In any case the king's initiation gave a special sort of stamp of approval and patronage to Gaudiya Vaishnavism and as the fervour for Gaudiya Vaishnavism grew, the other varieties of Vaishnavism came to be somewhat looked down upon and discriminated against.

After the king of Orissa, under the very roof of Lord Jagannatha at Puri officially took to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, the smaller vassal king also took to the same line. When a particular religion becomes the king's religion, it seems to gather a special glamour and a special right to a position of vantage over the others. That seems to have been the case after Prataparudra Deva took to Gaudiya Vaishnavism and became its most conspicuous devotee and let it sweep everything before it in the entire field. The Vaishnavism of the Gaudiya type did not try to complement what was already there in the native Vaisnava tradition in Orissa, it came as a superstructure as it were and took the day as a conquerer. The language in which the new converts in Orissa to Gaudiya Vaishnavism prayed and sung had been imported along with the cult. Even now in the existing Gaudiya centres in Orissa, the prayers and *kirtans* as a rule

are not in Oriya but in Bengalee, as the vogue was in the time of Shri Chaitanya. The Christian missionaries who had the patronage of an empire and went around to all countries to convert people to Christianity have adopted the language of convert country as the medium, they have never tried to impose their own language upon the people they went to convert. But so far as the question of language is concerned, Gaudiya Vaishnavism's way has been unique. The reason has yet to be explored why Shri Chaitanyá who stood for such liberalism and humanism in religion stuck to his own language wherever his mission took him. And it is strange that Gaudiya Vaishnavism has not changed even to-day in this matter.

Shri Chaitanya came to Orissa in about the year 1509. It is said that his family originally belonged to Jajpur in Orissa but had some generations back migrated to Shrihatta (modern Sylhet in Bangladesh) from where his father Jagannatha Mishra again came to Nabadwip in Gauda (Bengal) to settle down there. He came as a young man, got married in a Brahmin family in Nabadwip and became the head of a family in which Shri Chaitanya was born as the tenth child. Shri Ishwara Puri, the guru of Shri Chaitanya was himself a disciple of Shri Madhavendra Puri who was quite known in Orissa during his time and is even now remembered for having installed the image in the Gopinatha temple at Remuna near Balasore in Orissa. The story goes that Shri Chaitanya, when he arrived at Puri, stayed there only for a short time and then went on pilgrimage to different places in South India after which he came back to Puri to be there till his death in about 1533. According to an Oriya account of Shri Chaitanya, belonging to about a century after him, the Chaitanya Bhagabata by Ishwara Das, Shri Chaitanya during this interregnum did not really go south but went to Nabadwip from where he returned to Puri to live there till his death.

All this deserves mention because the Panchasakha were all at Puri when Shri Chaitanya was there during the last

part of his Leela and when Gaudiya Vaishnavism came to flourish as the king's religion. There was once an opinion, according to some students of this period of Oriya literature, that the Panchasakha were not but disciples of Shri Chaitanya and preachers of the cult founded by him. This opinion has since been refuted as erroneous. The Panchasakha of course accepted Chaitanya as their guru, received formal initiation from him, but that should not make us believe that thay were just Chaitanyaites and nothing more. In fact they were representatives, each in his own characteristic way, of the long assimilated Vaishnava tradition of Orissa. They accepted Shri Chaitanya, when the latter came to Orissa on his pilgrimage, as a great leader and prophet of the Vaishnava faith. In the texts written by Panchasakha, many are the lines full of adulation for Shri Chaitanya, who is extolled as a *avatara*, at times equated with Krishna and Lord Jagannatha. Ishwara Das goes as far as to say in his Chaitanya Bhagabata that after Krishna had done away with Kamsa in the Dwapara era and down himself back to his heavenly abode, the sage Narada brought him the information that there was again a serious decline of faith among mankind. People were immersed deep in irreligion and had forgotten even the name of God. So other Divine Birth was immediately necessary. Hearing of man's plight on earth, God at once took the decision to assume another birth and go down to earth once again with his close associates for the redemption of the fallen human race. It was thus that He came to be born as Shri Chaitanya. To make the story complete, Ishwara Das says that Shri Chaitanya's father Jagannatha Mishra and his mother, Sachi Devi were no other than Vasudeva and Devaki, who having been deprived of the privilege of bringing up their child Krushna in the Dwapara age, had performed severe austerities and had thereby earned the divine order to be born as the parents of Shri Chaitanya to avail themselves of the opportunity to rear him as their child. Ishwara Das has repeatedly told of

Shri Chaitanya as the Supreme Lord of the entire creation.

This was how it started. But after the king's conversion, as Gaudiya Vaishnavism came to be acclaimed and patronised as the court religion there slowly began a parting of ways. It must have caught the notice of the king on occasions that the Panchasakha were not full-fledged followers of the official line and that they wanted to preserve their marks of distinction. He then thought of taking them to task and putting them to various sorts of test. Jasovanta Das, one of the Panchasakha, mentions in one of his books that king Prataparudra subjected the Panchasakha to severe tests even in the very presence of Shri Chaitanya himself. It should be remembered in this context that at least two of the Panchasakha had already earned fame and recognition on the strength of their own merits when Shri Chaitanya first arrived at Puri. Balarama Das, the eldest among them had already completed writing his Oriya Ramayana and gained an eminence attained only by Sarala Dasa before him. Jagannatha Das had also been through his monumental creation of the Shrimadbhagavata in Oriya. It only indicates the greatness of Shri Chaitanya that he recognised the worth of Jagannatha Das and conferred on him the title of 'Atibadi', which definitely irritated some in his inner circle of followers who had come with him to Orissa from Nabadwip.

Shri Chaitanya's approach, in propagating religion, was through the power of the king. This was so at least in Orissa where his mission got the royal patronage and was soon in the high tide of glory in the eyes of all concerned. This reminds one of Martin Luther of the Reformation years in Europe almost in the same period. Luther believed in converting the Kings and the Lords first. After he had won over a king to his own side, he was sure that the rest, in obedience to the conventional attitude to authority prevailing in those times, would follow. There was no doubt about the short-term gains but these ended more often than not in substituting a new authoritarianism for

the old Papal type, while in the inner spiritual climate where a real change ought to have occurred, there was not really much of a change. People worshipped differently, the servitude of a new myth having replaced that of an old one. Most probably it was due to this approach of Shri Chaitanya and his henchmen in Orissa in the 16th century, that Gaudiya Vaishnavism before long reduced itself to a veritable externality, did not bring about any real change and what was worse, continued to remain a superstructure over the old modes. It could have been a revolution but instead it soon settled down as a monastic cult. Even to-day the monastic heads of the Gaudiya *maths* or the Gaudiya Vaishanvism centres that we have in Orissa are more anxious about their links with Nabadwip than with the neighbourhood of which they could have become a living part. The singings and chantings, the routine worship and the rituals are still conducted in a language that had been imported along with Shri Chaitanya more than four centuries back. On the other hand, the Panchasakha, when they founded centres of their own, at different places in Orissa, called them gadis, where the sacred books were preserved and regarded with great reverence. There are, even to-day, in many a household in remote villages, the well-known Bhagavata-gadis where one will find the never-to be-forgotten treasures of those days—the Oriya Bhagavata of Jagannatha Das, the Oriya Mahabharata of Sarala Dasa and the Jagamohana Ramayana of Balarama Das, besides many other Puranas in their Oriya versions. The centre that Jasovanta Das founded in his own village in the district of Cuttack is to-day called the Jasovanta Gadi and not the Jasovanta *matha* ; likewise, the centre founded by Achyutananda in his own village in the same district is known as a gadi and not a matha. The tradition has persisted through the centuries and in the same line, we have the gadi of Bhima Bhoi and even the Mahima Gadi, was the headquarters of a great religious movement of the 19th century in Orissa.

About three centuries before Shri Caitanya came to Orissa, the celebrated Vaishnava poet Jayadeva had written his immortal poem, the Geeta Govinda. Jayadeva was a great devotee of the Dwaita-adwaita school of philosophy expounded by Shri Nimbarka. With the popularity bestowed by Geeta Govinda, there grew up gradually at different places in Orissa centres of Radha-Krishna worship. About three centuries after Jayadeva a Suryavansi king of Orissa, Shri Purusottama Dev, wrote his 'Abhinav Venisamhara'. He also extolled the worshlp of Radha and Krshna as Jugalamurti. And shortly before Chaitanya deva was in Orissa, Rai Ramanada had already produced his "Shri Jagannatha Ballava Natakam" in Sanskrit, written in a melodramatic form in the Geeta Govinda style. It is said that the drama was once staged at Puri in 1509 by the order of king Prataparudra. When Shri Chaitanya came to Orissa, Ramananda was serving as the plenipotentiary of the Orissan king in the southern regions of his kingdom at Rajamahendri by the Godavari. Shri Chaitanya, during his trips in the South met Ramananda Rai and after that the latter came to Puri and remained there as a very close associate of Shri Chaitanya.

All this is being said to bring home to us the fact that when Shri Chaitanya came to Orissa, it was by no means a vacuum that he came to. Vaishnavism of his type and variety had already struck deep roots and had many adherents, poets and scholars in its service. He, more than anything else, added the power of his great personality to the movement, provided a unique spur and after having won over the king to his side, he played really the role of a conqueror. But in the general tradition of Orissa's Vaishnavism, the Radha concept for several reasons had not secured as prominent a place as was given to it by the Gaudiya movement. We have already hinted in one of the previous chapters that, as in many other respects, in the Bhakti movement also, Orissa had a deeper alignment with the Vaishnavism of the South than with that of the North.

The special features of southern Vaishnavism as distinguished from its northern counterpart is worth studying. In fact, some very enlightened studies have been made in the Hindi language revealing the salient features and points of departure in the Bhakti movements in the Kannada and the Telugu speaking areas and their respective literatures. We come to know from these studies that in the Krishna-bhakti movements in both these language areas during the middle ages, the twain conception of Radha-Krshna and the conception of Radha as an exclusive theme are conspicuous by their absence. The same has been the case with the great stream of Orissan Vaishnavism down the ages. To give only a few examples, in the Ganesha Bibhuti of Balarama Das, Radha and Krshna are just representations of the principles of the primordial female and the primordial male respectively. And as these two principles are only the two attributes of the one central principle of Being and have the same Source, Balarama speaks of them as having a sister-and-brother relationship, and not the lover-beloved one as we find it in the Chaitanyaite expositions. Another of the Panchasakha, Achyutananda describes Radha and Krshna in one of his books, "Tattwa-Bodhini", also as sister and brother. This brings us near to the sister and brother relationship represented by the deities of the Puri temple, Subhadra and Jagannatha, which points to a difference in attitude. We begin to understand the whole thing when we come to Achyutananda's "Nitya Rahasa" where, though borrowing the familiar term "Rahasa" from the Vaishnava nomenclature, Achyutanada proceeds to give it a metaphysical interpretation of it based on yoga. According to this interpretation, in the realm of the eternal "Rahasa" (Rasa in original Sanskrit), there is no day and no night, no here and no beyond, it is beyond all reach, beyond all comprehensibility. The realm is on the other side of all concepts of deity, all conceptions of name and form and what is more, in it the four-fold conception of the deity (the

tetrad, in Oriya called the Chaturdha Murati, the four-in-one, meaning Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and the Sudarshana wheel, worshipped as the presiding deities of the Purusottama Kshetra at Puri) dissolves into a single formlessness. That also is the realm where all kinds of god-conception meet their annihilation, the realm from where all the gods take their being and in which are again dissolved.

That is the realm of the thousand-petalled lotus, the lotus on which the eternal Radha offers herself as the beloved ; from that eternal Radha is born this entire created universe, also are born all the Shaktis including Durga, Parvati and the eight Chandis. It may be recalled that according to the injunctions of the Tantras one has to rouse the serpent Power, ascend along the Chakras till one attains the thousand-petalled one, and there realise the eternal Shakti, the Creatrix of all that is and the source from which all have their being. Achyutananda has gone a step further and installed Krshna or the Ineffable Purusa above Radha or the eternal Shakti. As expressed in the poetic image of the Sadhaka, Krshna, the Supreme Purusa remains hidden in the place where nectar springs and falls down on Radha's bosom from the eternal reserves of Ganga, Jamuna and Saraswati. There we have the sixteen thousand and odd Gopikas attending on the real Shrikrshna. The seat of the thousand-petalled Lotus is again described as the eternal bower of Vrindavana seen inwardly. And there Lord Krshna has put His feet on Radha's body, has His poise right on her loins.

And the ascending path of realisation for one who will partake of this eternal Rasa is described as follows : We have to elevate ourselves to the seat of the thousand-petalled lotus and meet the eternal Radha there. And, by using that also as a passage and going still beyond, we can have the darshana of Krshna in His real essence, the Krshna who has no beginning. Here, in this description one gets a glimpse of the special orientations of the Tantric sadhana prevalent in Orissa. To partake of the eternal Rasa is to

go beyond the realisation of the Shakti and reach the realm of the Supreme Purusa, beyond the male-female principle. This metaphysical importance is perhaps an aspect of the special emphasis that was given in Tantric sadhana in Orissa. And thus *Nitya Rahasa*, though a very small work of Achyutananda, assumes a very significant place in the field of research in the religion and literature of medieval Orissa. More light will be thrown on this field when more manuscripts are discovered and studied. But it goes without saying that by taking the clue from the Gaudiya Vaishnavas and using the word Rasa, one of their very familiar terms and pointing at the principle of the Supreme One through an interpretation of that word, Achyutananda has really done something which would have been very unusual for other sects in those days but which was the usual attitude with the Panchasakha. He could not do that if he were only a loyal Vaishnava of the Gaudiya type or if he followed the ways of the conventional Tantras. The Panchasakha aimed at a synthesis, accepted the essence in all the ways and gave each its due relevance by relating it to a vision and an aspiration that was total and synergetic.

Thus, to come back from where we had started, the Panchasakha were not merely Chaitanyaites, neither it was Chaitanya who brought Vaishnavism to Orissa from outside. The Panchasakha were many more things than being mere Chaitanyaites, they were Chaitanya's contemporaries and heirs of a legacy that had its own characteristic roots and features of development. Shri Chaitanya, when he came to Orissa, came to a land that was already saturated with Vaishnavism and the Bhakti movement; he only contributed his brand of the way to the total movement. He obtained apparent and quick success because he could win over the king to his side. This incident also had another result; the Oriya Vaishnavas including the Panchasakha incurred the king's disfavour, were put to humiliating tests and had to seek ways and moorings outside the courts and its coteries. It is very interesting to see that after the Panchasakha, most

of the poets and Sadhakas of kindred shades had to withdraw to forests and caves and to villages far away from the capital. Since then we have two branches of Vaishnava tradition in Orissa with no inclination to mingle: the Gaudiya tradition in the mathas and the Orissan tradition in the gadis. Their points of departure remain marked down to this day.

We get clues to the difference even in the Panchasakha literature. The Panchasakha, includiug Balarama Das, never kept it a secret that they were commanded by Lord Jagannatha to come close to Shri Chaitanya and take initiation from him. They traced King Prataparudra's own initiation from Shri Chaitanya to the same divine command. With the Lord of the world as their supreme guru, it was not, in the field of their spiritual alignment, at all difficult for them to acknowledge Shri Chaitanya, a supremely realised soul, as their guru and derive inspiration from the great leader's mission and message. Even one of the near contemporaries of Panchasakha, Ishwara Das, went as far as to equate Shri Chaitanya with Buddha Avatara, thus symbolically equating him with Lord Jagannatha. Nevertheless, Lord Jagannatha was above all and everything and loyality to Lord Jagannatha was above all other loyalties. Achyutananda has said in one his most important works, that Lord Jagannatha Himself had commanded the Panchasakha who were "so close to His heart", preach the "Niradhara Mantra", which is self-explanatory. Preaching Niradhara, that is, the supreme truth without Adhara or qualification, was a special errand taken up by the Panchasakha. That did not mean, of course, that they should condemn all adharas or idols, but meant that they should never lose sight of the truth behind all personification and make exclusive fetishes of idols. The Panchasakha were not against Saguna worshipper so, but they were never tired of reminding all concerned of the essence behind all representation.

It is strange and rather intriguing that though Shri

Chaitanya spent the last and perhaps the most important years of his life—almost two decades—at Puri, the Bengali accounts have very little say about this phase. And these accounts altogether ignore the Panchasakha. Such differentital treatment of the Panchasakha by the Chaitanya biographers of the Gaudiya fold has been somewhat of an enigma. Even those works in Bengali that are considered to be the most faithful give but a few pages to tell about the followers who joined the Master in Orissa. As historical and biographical records, these works have been deemed to be somewhat tainted by prejudice even by several students in Bengal of Shri Chaitanya and his time. The biographers have betrayed their bias in glorifying only those followers of Shri Chaitanya who belonged to Bengal. And hence, many important events like Shri Chaitanya's travels in South India and his very close relations with Ramananda and the Panchasakha have been more or less relegated to a secondary place. History tells us that within half a century after Shri Chaitanya's death, the Gaudiya Vaishnavas were split though all of them took his name and invoked his authority. Those who thought themselves as the "most faithful" followers would not tolerate the incorrect doctrine. An instance in point is Jayananda, the author of Chaitanya Mangala, a work that smacks of a slightly different attitude from that of the stricter Gaudiya camp. Though customarily the Gaudiya text always pay their first tributes to Chaitanya, Nityananda and Adwaita, Jaynanda in his book has followed rather the older traditon of first saluting Ganapati to start his book. This is attributed as one of the reasons why the book is a little looked down upon and considered less sacred by the Gaudiya official stalwarts.

In their works, the Panchasakha, though they were as close to the Master during his years at Puri as Rupa, Sanatana and others who had come with him from Bengal, always reserved their first salutations for Jagannatha or the Supreme Lord. There is every reason to believe that though

the Panchasakha were initiated into the Chaitanya order and were very close to the great Master, they remained equally conscious of the essential spirit of the religious tradition of Orissa. It had a long heritage of its own and included the essence of Tantra and Yoga. The vision and the frame of reference of the Panchasakha religion would not be confined within the tight bounds of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. And that was why the latter regarded the Panchasakha as unreliable and even tended to ignore their existence. Even Jagannatha Das, on whom was conferred the title of Atibadi by Shri Chaitanya himself because he was the author in the Oriya language of Shrimadbhagavata, and who was held in high esteem in the whole Vaishnava world, was as good as ignored by the Gaudiya leaders, even by those who were moving in a close cluster around Shri Chaitanya. This tradition of comparative contempt towards Jagannatha Das has come down to our time among the Chaitanyaites. Though the place where Jagannatha used to stay and lived his life given to God, is situated at a distance of about a stone's throw from the present site of Gaudiya Vaishnava centre at Puri, the place is seldom considered worth visiting by the latter. When Shri Chaitanya himself was all praise for the Bhagavata in Oriya, the people of the Gaudiya alignment who then moved around him censured the work as spurious and full of undesirable diversions. All this goes to suggest that the animosities had already begun to be felt in the days following the death of Shri Chaitanya. Even the Oriya camp-followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism seem to have very carefully eliminated any discussion or mention of the Panchasakha from whatever they spoke or wrote. The Chaitanya Vilasa of Madhava Pattanayaka is a clear case in point.

In this context, Ishwara Das's Chaitanya Bhagavata in Oriya assumes great significance in a study of the movements and confrontations of those years. Ishwara Das deserves our great respect for his completely impartial attitude. He has, in this work of his, allowed no prejudice

to colour his view in favour of or against one school or the other. Ishwara Das has described Shri Chaitanya as the Buddhavatara. Almost all of the Panchasakha had identified Shri Chaitanya with Lord Jagannatha and again Shri Jagannatha as the Supreme Lord in His manifestation as Buddha. In the Chaitanya Bhagavata there are frequent allusions to Yoga and to Tantra. One of his sages, Adwaita, has been described as having his home in Yoganagara, situated on the bank of the river Saraswati which flows between the Inala Ganga and Pinala Jamuna. One would wish there were more works discovered belonging to the category of Ishwara Das's Chaitanya Bhagavata, and made available for discussion. That could surely give us more clues about the state of Vaishnavism in Orissa, both in the king's court and outside it and about the conflict that simmered between the two. The situation can perhaps be compared with that in the contemporary Telugu region when the king of Vijayanagar who had been a Saiva, took to Vaishnavism and swore all support to the latter. This decision of the king engendered a keen conflict between the Saivas and Vaishnavas of the kingdom who then became engaged in a war of mutual vilification. It is said that several Saiva poet at that time went over to Vaishnavism in order to curry the king's favour and shine in its light. One may assume that something like this happened in Orissa also. As a particular cult became the king's own cult and the followers of that cult had greater prospects of flourishing, many Vaishnavas of the traditional line must have thought it wise to follow in the royal footsteps. Only a few could have resisted the temptation. Needless to say, the Panchasakha belonged to this small band. They took their gadis far away from the court and after them the tradition was kept alive in the forests and caves till its resurgence in a mighty wave in the nineteenth century.

The Chaitanya Bhagavata, we have already seen, gives almost equal coverage to the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement and the Panchasakha. About Balarama Das, the

author says that Balarama did not have any litany that he used, nor did he have a particular style of bearing the tilak mark indicative of a particular denomination. But he had definitely the bhava of Vaishnava, the inner spirit and the inward orientation that really qualifies a person as a Vaishnava. Such a one was Balarama Das, as Ishwara Das has put it, "who was firmly established in his faith in God." This description may be applied to the Panchasakha as a whole and their attitude in life. None of them were oversensitive as regards what insignia or marks one bore to distinguish oneself from others. They were all men of deep faith, to them what mattered most was depth. They deemed it to-be of utmost importance to be saturated with bhava, that alone makes one a bhakta, and not the self-advertising externalities. Not that externalities were spurned by them, or were regarded as necessary evils, but they accepted them only as means, never as ends. As regards external observances, they were, unlike many sects, against overdoing. While accepting the variety of ways and practices without rancour, they could afford to stand above them and to point at the summit to which all ways aimed to lead.

No doubt there have been occasional references to the Nitya Rasa conception in the Gaudiya Vaishnava literature and the Gaudiyas have associated themselves with this conception when they have talked about their metaphysical roots; but in the larger field of practice and propagation of the way, these roots have been lost sight of as it were. The reason for this was that when Chaitanya Vaishnavism spread so widely and so quickly among the masses and so many took to it, it became very difficult for the movement to sustain its rootedness and the essential philosophical attitudes. The hordes of disciples came from all strata of society. From the man of the street right up to the king. The spell spread like magic and more and more people were attracted by novelties like the Kirtans, etc. It seems Shri Chaitanya could smell the danger of centrifugality and over-

expansion of the whole movement and being unable to control, had to accept it. Orissa's long rootedness in Tantra and the Buddhistic worldview had helped its Vaishnavism never to lose contact with its deeper philosophical inspirations. This is all through so conspicuous in the Panchasakha who in almost each of their works, small and big, always hark back to the basic attitudes, even when they are dealing with the most extrinsic things. Even the description of Krshna's Lila with the Gopis and even of the Kadamba tree is never without clear symbolic overtones.

In the Sunya Samhita, one of Achyutananda's most important works, we have in distinct alignment the concepts of the eternal Krshna and the eternal Radha. Achyutananda relates how on a trek to his celestial abode in the company of all his eight queens the Krishna of Dwaraka had a darshan of the eternal Radha. According to Achyutananda's description, the eyes of everyone except those of Sudama who had the experience from a distance were dazzled by the light and lustre of that abode. It is interesting to note that while fixing the births of the Panchasakha in previous eras, Achyutananda describes himself as having been born as Sudama in the Dwapara era. In more than one place, Radha and Krshna have been sung as the Immaculate Nature and the Pure conscious Purusha, the immobile and the kinetic manifestations of the Supreme Being, prior to all. Thus, the concept of those two source principles preceding the phenomenal creation is the concept of Radha and Krshna. These dual principles are the source of all creation, and all Lila, which is the created universe, has its source in the eternal Rasa of the eternal Radha in communion with the eternal Krshna.

The Panchasakha had no use for mere externalities and empty ceremony. They have denounced the degeneration of the Tantras into magic and have spoken about the total fruitlessness of using them for mundane gains. Likewise, while dealing with Vaishnavism, they were not preoccupied with the outward garb. They of course accepted some

externals as means, but always had their hearts fixed upon Jagannatha, the Lord who symbolised for them all the things that mattered most. Even after the Gaudiya variety of the Vaishnava movement received the king's favour and protection and all the winds began to blow in its favour, the Panchasakha remained conscious of their roots and stuck to them. Theirs was a note of warning not to be deluded by the glow that seemed to fill the day. They openly prophesied the appearance of many imposters of great ingenuity roaming about with all the sadhu's garb and marks on them, professing to be God's devotees and boasting of their qualifications as gurus. One wonders if the Panchasakha did not write all this as they saw what was happening before their very eyes in Puri, as the drive, with the king's sanction was on for more and yet more converts, irrespective of any spiritual urge from within.

To repeat, Shri Chaitanya came to Orissa because it had been a land of Vaishnavism for a very long time. To him it was like a pilgrimage. The presiding deity in the temple at Puri fully absorbed him. He gave instant recognition to realised souls and god-intoxicated persons like Balarama Das and Jagannatha Das. But some of the disciples both among those who had come with him from Bengal and others who were recruited here in Orissa, were not so happy about it. It seems there had already been brewing some differences causing bitterness within the fold itself. The Panchasakha must have sensed the rifts and they thought they would do well to hold on to the essentials of their own native legacy, without disowning their loyality and devotion to Shri Chaitanya. Pained at the quarrels among his own followers, Shri Chaitanya it seems took to an attitude of of inner withdrawal. He got himself attached more and more to Lord Jagannatha and gave less and less attention to what was going around him. It is interesting again to see that in the last phase of Shri Chaitanya's stay at Puri, the Oriya Vaishnavas including the Panchasakha drew gradually nearer to him, while his own henchmen seemed

more and more drawn away from him and alienated. We may say there arose a clearly discernible communication gap, hinting at an eventual parting of ways.

Our source-book from here onwards will be Dibakara Das's Jagannatha Charitamrita. Though meant to be a biography of one of the Panchasakha, Jagannatha Das, this book throws much light, some of it very curious and in suggestive hints, about things that happened during Shri Chaitanya's last days at Puri. Though not exactly a contemporary of the Panchasakha and Shri Chaitanya, Dibakara Das came almost immediately after them. He must have gathered his facts from many who were contemporaries of Shri Chaitanya and the Panchasakha. Dibakara Das tells us how the Gaudiya Vaishnavas who were staying at Puri with Shri Chaitanya became jealous of the intimacy that grew up between the Master and Jagannatha Das. They were not at all happy that such an intimacy should grow between Shri Chaitanya and an Oriya Brahmin. This appeared to them as a mark of the Master's diminishing love and concern for them—the Gaudiya followers. They were suspicious that the Master might now decide to stay permanently in Orissa and behave as one of Orissa. Thus they were determined to break up the intimacy between Shri Chaitanya and his Oriya bhaktas. They tried to persuade Shri Chaitanya that the Oriya bhaktas were not real converts, that they had not received proper initiation and thus they could not claim to be true Vaishnavas.

Shri Chaitanya, the story goes, was greatly pained at these insinuations which he regarded as most unfair. His relations with Balarama and Jagannatha went on growing more and more intimate and the climax was reached when he conferred the title of Atibadi on the latter. The disgruntled disciples were surely now at the end of their tether. Bemoaning their lot, they decided it was better to leave the place and the circle at Puri than to remain there to be belittled before the Oriya Vaishnava whom the Master gave greater recognition and honour. The Master

seemed to be forgetting the services they had rendered to him in the past and giving first place to those who came later. They placed their grievances before Shri Chaitanya who defended his stand and tried to convince them that Orissa as a place of pilgrimage had a special significance for all who aspired to be Vaishnavas. He pointed out that it was not at all proper to ignore the tradition of a land or try to change it forcibly. The genius that he was with the highest spiritual attainments, Shri Chaitanya was all for accepting Lord Jagannath and giving the recognition due to the Panchasakha. This irritated the Gaudiyas all the more, and their expectations to win over the Master to their view were dashed. They left Puri and withdrew northwards as far as Jajpur. From there they sent a message to Puri that they could come back only if the Master himself came to persuade them to return, not otherwise.

The Mahaprabhu did comply with their wishes, but as ill luck would have it, he took Jagannatha Das with him. They stayed at Jajpur for six days, and Shri Chaitanya kept on addressing Jagannatha as Atibadi, to the extreme vexation of the already irate Gaudiya Vaishnavas. So the attempt at reconcilation failed and Chaitanya's old associates then left Jajpur for Vrindavana. Dibakara Das says that there was one more proposal from the side of the agrieved and this was a request to Chaitanya to leave Puri and join them, so that they could have the blessed privilege of living in his company and benefitting from it, but Shri Chaitanya would not agree. He said he had taken a decision to stay at Puri as long as he lived. Thus, according to Dibakara Das, the parting of ways was complete. Those who left for Vrindavana gave up the practices they followed while at Puri. They took to their own denominational Tilak mark, went back to their own Mantra. Leaving Lord Jagannatha, they adopted the worship of Madanmohan; in the place of the Kalpataru, they took to the Kadamba tree.

With whatever pinch of salt one should take these narratives, this at least was true that there was a parting of ways and Shri Chaitanya had to encounter a desertion. But the reason seems to have been much deeper than the personal jealousies caused by the special honour conferred by the Master upon Jagannatha Das, as Dibakara Das a disciple of Jagannatha Das has chosen to depict it. The parting of ways, actually resulted from some basic difference in attitude. Shri Chaitanya, the great Master that he was, was able to see beyond the externals, but the others in the camp that had come with him from Nabadwip were not able to do so. The synthesis and the appeal of a great tradition already established at Puri surely made a contribution in development of Chaitanya and helped him to look beyond the partisan bound of an order he himself had been instrumental in founding. He returned to Puri and there he lived his last days in the company of a small group of Vaishnavas that had come to him in Orissa. The Panchasakha were among them. Rupa, Sanatana and the other Gaudiya stalwarts were destined for Vrindavana.

Some students in Bengal of Shri Chaitanya and his movement are unwilling to accept the above account as reliable though all admit the authenticity of the rift that led to a parting of ways between the two Vaishnava camps. One reason given for not accepting Dibakar Das's account is the difficulty to believe that the followers of Shri Chaitanya could be jealous to the point of such meanness. Anyway in the history of religions well-authenticated examples abound of rifts caused by rival partisans preoccupied with externals and even of disciples repudiating their Master in zealous misunderstanding of his true teaching. Through overemphasis on externalities a message is turned into a doctrine and a guru into an idol. In the zeal for external worship the need of inner spiritual renewal is neglected. In the present case, it may be submitted, a conflict between the two camps of Vaishnavism had started even in the very life-time of Shri Chaitanya.

Gaudiya Vaishnavism could not have an easy headway in a soil that have been differently seasoned. The royal patronage of course could make it very powerful, but to be accepted in the heart of the people was another matter. Shri Chaitanya himself seems to have drawn towards the Orissan Vaishnava tradition more and more as he stayed longer at Puri and came in more intimate contact with the Panchasakha. The Bengali biographies of Shri Chaitanya observe almost complete silence about Shri Chaitanya's last years at Puri. We are told little more than the bare facts, namely that the master spent his last days at Puri and left his mortal body there. This omission could not be just accidental ; one is led to believe that it was intentional. Balarama, Achyutananda and Jagannatha have spared no words to extol Shri Chaitanya as their guru, but the Gaudiya Vaishnava texts betray a kind of conspiracy of silence about them, which seemed meant to eliminate all mention of the Panchasakha from Gaudiya Vaishnava literature. This makes one inclined to believe the story given by Dibakara Das, namely, that Shri Chaitanya spent his last days at Puri sans his Gaudiya disciples, from which it would be reasonable to infer that during this period he was emotionally much drawn to Orissan Vaishnavism.

To conclude, one may say the Chaitanya episode in Orissa and Shri Chaitanya's relations with Panchasakha are still shrouded in mystery. We do not have many Oriya manuscripts which have been thoroughly studied, dealing with that phase of Chaitanya's lila. But several scholars, in Bengal as well as in Orissa, have reported their awareness of the existence of several manuscripts of this category. Almost all the literature that is available in the Oriya language dealing with Shri Chaitanya's days in Orissa is Panchasakha literature. For any further light on the subject one looks forward to the exploration of the yet unexplored wealth of data. As nothing more is likely to be available about the phase in the Bengali language, further study of this phase of Chaitanya's life depends on the discovery of

new Oriya sources. Till then scholars have to depend, apart from what the Panchasakha have written, upon the two available very valuable works: Ishwara Das's Chaitanya Bhagavata and Dibakara Das's Jagannatha Charitamrita.

CHAPTER VI

IMPACT UPON LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

ACCORDING to the Chullabagga of the Buddhistic literature once some Brahmins came to Buddha and complained that the lay folks were defiling his teaching by uttering them in the spoken language of the masses. They advised Buddha to deliver them in the Sanskrit language to avoid any chance of such defilement. Buddha did not take this advice of the learned Brahmins, because as he said, he wanted that every person should rather receive these teachings in his own language, in the language he speaks and understands. And so he continued giving his sermons and explaining his way to the people in the latter's own spoken language. Every Indian language has its own story of having broken away from the Sanskrit language, having weaned itself from its mother as it were to become a complete medium of expression for itself. There was a time when Sanskrit was considered as the only language in which the best thoughts of all men of excellence could be expressed. The spoken language was always different from the written language and also more intelligible, but no one could ever think that the really serious and important things could be expressed through the spoken tongue without losing their sanctity.

As far as the Eastern group of the Indian languages are concerned, a breakthrough was made by the wandering siddhas of the 7th-8th centuries who decided to depend on the spoken word as a medium of communication with the common people. Some of them, Luipa, Sarahapa and Kanhupa, can be reasonably assumed to have hailed from Orissa. They were among the pioneers who broke the

sacred convention and sang and preached in the people's own language instead of in Sanskrit. The inhibitory gap between thought and speech was thus closed and the bhasas, the spoken languages, took their second birth and came to be recognised as fit media of all communication.

Sarala Dasa will be remembered in Oriya literature as the real creator of the Oriya language, who secured for the spoken language full access into written literature. He must have literally created a major part of the medium, he chose when he set upon writing the Oriya Mahabharata. Most of the *tadbhava* words that are in the Oriya language to-day. we owe to his ingenuity and courage of new experiment with words. If a language has anything ever to contribute to the making of a national consciosness, then we can say in the case of the Oriya literature that it was Sarala Dasa who first created this consciousness and this unity. A new faith was born, to stand on one's own and to be able to express oneself in the language one spoke. Sarala Dasa was also a pioneer in introducing all sorts of deshaja words into his literary vocabulary. All this was happening, it ought to be remembered, when Sanskrit was being patronised by kings and was at the height of its prestige in the courts. All this was happening, too, in a remote village far away from the headquarters of the learned. Sarala Dasa called himself a Shudramuni as he was doing all this and working for a new birth and a new faith. And what Sarala Dasa had initiated was completed by the Panchasakha among whom Balarama Das's contribution was the greatest through his Jagamohana Ramayana.

The movement to switch over to the spoken language of the people came as a national phenomenon in all the Indian literatures during the middle ages. The movement in religion and literature ushered in by the saints also spread into the realm of language as a powerful change over to the spoken language of the people as the real medium of expression. The gods could now be sung in the language of the common people, by the saints' who themselves were

all well-versed in Sanskrit but had resolved to write in the spoken language everything they wished to write and bring to the people. It seems Ramananda was the first adventurer in this direction. He was a disciple of Ramanuja's thought and Ramanuja wrote, spoke and even thought and had his being in no other language but Sanskrit. Ramananda came to be convinced that knowledge and any message about the life of spirit could never percolate to the larger mass of the people as long as the masters kept themselves confined within the bounds of a language that was not spoken by the people. The entire Sant tradition in North India soon took to this new way and got the languages on to a flourishing level. Kabir, who was a disciple of Ramananda, proclaimed that the spoken language had the dynamism of the water of a flowing stream while Sanskrit was the water of a well that was bouud on all sides and had no movement. Sarala Dasa and the Panchasakha, in any study of the Indian languages, will definitely fall into the same category as Kabir and his like. Balarama Das's Jagamohan Ramayana, Jagannatha Das's Bhagavata and Achyutananda's Harivamsa as well as the Gita translations of Balarama and Jagannatha were creations that raised the then spoken Oriya language to new heights. Let it be remembered that the Panchasakha—especially Balarama, Jagannatha and Achyutananda—were great scholars in Sanskrit themselves, had access to the Sanskrit original works of the great tradition, but they as a rule were never moved from within to write anything in Sanskrit. Whatever is available of their writing is all written in Oriya, simple, easy Oriya without any show of erudition or sophistication of style. A contrast is provided by the kings such as Purusottama Deva and Prataparudra Deva, who ruled over Orissa during this time and were Patrons of learning. They not only patronised the Sanskrit language, but to win a sort of recognition in the assembly of the scholars also composed verses in Sanskrit, or at least, as was the vogue at that time, got Sanskrit verses written in their names by the pundits who waited upon them and adorned

their courts. Sanskrit was the order of the day. The Panchasakha wanted that order to change. They took to writing in Oriya and gave the great books that were then available in Sanskrit only a garb of the spoken language and brought them to the very doors of the people, within the range of everyone's comprehension.

In that tradition of spread and percolation, we can include the wealth of Koilis, Chautisas and the Bhajans, which have come down to this day from the hoary times of Sarala Dasa and the Panchasakha. In a region where less than one fourth of the population is literate it is not surprising that these Koilis, Chautisas, Bhajans and the Oriya Puranas, indicate the literary level so far as the major portion of the people are concerned. It is difficult to ascertain where exactly the folklorish phase of literature came to an end to give way to the Koilis, etc. and from this view point, the modern trend has yet to make a real dent. After the Panchasakha, the trend to remain close to the people in respect of language in the written literature did continue in the case of some writers of course, specially with the saints and mystics who withdrew from the capital and at times tried to survive through the many gadis and in the forests and caves, but a more powerful trend towards Sanskrtisation again set in—a sort of jugglery with words to reduce the reader with play on word-meanings without giving him any taste of real experience. This was the Reeti Phase in Oriya literature that flourished mainly in the courts of kings when verbosity in versification became a substitute for poetic inspiration. Under the Oriya poets' total subservience to the rules of Sanskrit poetics and Sanskrit diction in that period and the artificiality of their language, literature seemed to move farther and farther away from life and from people. Literature became more an ornament than an experience to be genuinely expressed and shared. Yet the other tradition, though subdued, persisted, as a parallel strand. Gopalkrushna, Brajanatha Badajena, Fakiramohan, Nandakishore, Meher and Gopabandhu Das were the

upholders of that tradition, a refrain from which can be heard even now in Oriya literature, both in prose and poetry, in the works of several writers. Any literature to rediscover itself has to follow this trend, which takes it nearer to life through the language it uses as its medium.

Balarama Das has mentioned in his Jagamohan Ramayana that he was the son of one Somanatha Mahapatra, an official who served under the king of Orissa and was stationed at Puri. Thus in society, Balarama ought to have been known as Balarama Mahapatra. In the same way Jagannatha ought to have been Jagannatha Mishra and Achyutananda should have been Achyutananda Khuntia for that matter. Jasovanta was a Kshatriya by birth. By their own choice they all came to be known as Dasas, servants of God as they have explained in their works. They were in all probability already known as Dasas before Chaitanya came to Puri from Bengal with the other members of his Gaudiya camp. This was a deliberate step on their part. The Panchasakha wanted to abolish all barriers of caste creed and all other man-made social distinctions. They looked forward to a new society based on new values of equality, human dignity and equal rights to attain self-realisation. It is interesting to see it was the same movement trying to express the same expressions all over the country during those centuries, and its leaders were the bhaktas, both of Nirguna and Saguna persuasions, mystics who wrote and sang in the people's language. Kabir, Nanak, Shri Chaitanya, Shankar Dev, Jnandev and Narshi Mehta were all against caste discriminations. They proceeded from the faith that man was a man because he was the carrier of the divine, entrusted with the task of expressing the divine in his life upon earth, They held the view that to realise his highest aspiration, that is God-realisation and to live according to the behests of the best in himself, every human being needed to live in such a society as believed in dignity for all. They all were born in a society which believed in differences and distances between man and man in castes

and in the dominance of one caste or some castes over the others. To the Panchasakha this appeared as a very antispiritual arrangement to them and most uncongenial for the realisation of spiritual values by men. They rebelled against this order and called for an entirely new set of social values, values which could strengthen a man's urge to become more human, more genuine and more responsive to life from within. Externalities (external observances) were declared as non-essentials; what was essential was the willingness to change, the willingness to get out of the old moulds to be able to live with better premises of living and aspiring. These bhaktas and singers were themselves from diverse castes, not necessarily from the highest and the most privileged caste. Many of them were from the very lowest castes, and they did not have to live their traditional professions to sing of God and plead for a social order more congenial for living a God-ward life. They insisted on valuing men for their intrinsic worth, irrespective of external denominational marks.

It was according to this logic that Balarama Mahapatra became Balarama Das and all the others of the Panchasakha group did likewise. They were all openly against the Brahministic restrictions in society, in the matter of men's access to the Shastras as well as to Sadhana. They were perhaps against all kinds of authoratianism, including that of the king. In the appendix to his Oriya translation of Bhagavatgita, Balarama Das refers to himself as having openly declared before the king and the assembly of the learned that access to the Shastras could never be an exclusive privilege of the Brahmins and that all who were bhaktas by aptitude and by choice should have always an access to them. He made this statement and stuck to it knowing that he was thereby inviting punishment and torture at the hands of the king. We come across in Achyutananda's Gurubhakti Gita the injunction that before one gets the initiation from the guru, one has to invite four persons from the four different castes and entertain them equally as

honoured guests. This was clearly meant for a blow at the notion of high and low castes, and specially at the supermacy of the Brahmins. The injunction is made all the more telling by the reference to the occasion of its applicability, namely, initiation with its all important association with Brahmins in people's minds. The instruction to invite four persons from the four different castes and treat with equal honour was going straight against an old sacrosanct ideology. That, perhaps more than anything else, symbolised an avowal that by the initiation one was going to look beyond all discriminations of caste and the rejection of a society that believed in it. Again in another of his books the Shunya Samhita, Achyutananda proclaims that one born in a low caste or a person who is casteless is not debarred from aspiring after God-realisation. This is surely speaking from a plane very different from the one from which contemporary tradition spoke.

Even today, most of the followers of Panchasakha belong to the comparatively low castes in the social hierarchy. Balarama Das has often been called the guru of the milkmen's community. Achyutananda has written a whole series of books to proclaim that the milkmen, though assigned to a rather low place in society, are not really low. They are, like all other men, entitled to walk on the Godward path. He has also not forgotten the fishermen, lowly placed by the law-givers in the social hierarchy perhaps because the fishermen by allowing themselves to be branded as killers of innocent life make it possible for many others, the non-fishermen, to be fisheaters ! Achyutananda's Kaibarta Gita speaks for the fishermen's community. The burden of this small work is to emphasis that all men are the same in essence, which is clear to one who has the right sort of eye, the eye of knowledge, to see. That essence is not affected by the variety of professions and vocations of men take to and which are necessary for the proper functioning of a human society. Notions of high and low are all cooked up in this world, no one is big or small or high or low because of his

birth. Even the scavenger is in essence of the divine. Balarama Das seems to have excelled the others in the vehemence of his anti-caste pronouncements. There is no difference between the four castes, or between the four hundred of them, for that matter because all are born of the same light that God Himself is, the Jyoti, as he puts it. Balarama addressing himself to God, says that the Vaishya is His eyes, the Kshatriya His ears, the Brahmin the air of His breath, and the Shudra represents His force. All this strikes at the very basis of the traditionally accepted belief that the four Varnas were divinely ordained to be different and variously graded as high and low as they were created in order of descent from the face, arms, thighs and feet of the Creator.

According to a Buddhist legend, once a certain king of the Shakya dynasty made a resolve to get initiation from the Buddha. He renounced his throne, his kingdom and family, got himself clean shaved and donned in the red robe of recluse, presented himself to the Enlightened One who was then was in an assembly with his disciples. The Raja paid homage to all but one in the assembly and then took his seat. The person whom he had not paid homage was one of Buddha's renowned and closest disciples, but before he was initiated and joined the order, he had been a barber in the service of the Shakyas. The Buddha asked the king the reason of his omission to pay homage to that person. The reply was, "Oh Lord, I am a king of the Shakya dynasty and he had been a barber serving us. How could I pay homage to him ?" The Buddha submitted immediately that this was just an act of foolishness, for how can a Sannyasin have any family and caste of his own ?

In the Indian mystic tradition there are stories galore of saints who outgrew caste demarcations and barriers. After one's initiation one no longer belonged to the caste in which he had been born and belonged thenceforward to the community of initiates, which was a casteless community. The mystics and saints of the middle ages in India hailed

from all possible communities. Kabir was a weaver, Dadudayal a carder, Raidas was a cobbler and Namdeva a tailor. The very names of some of the Bauddha Siddacharyas also suggest that their position at birth was not at all high in the social order. And what is more, when these saints and realised souls said good-bye to their own social class links after initiation, not only their own life-style was definitely marked by a change ruled out all caste distinctions, they began preaching the ideal of a society without caste where man was primarily valued as man without any grading of high and low. At times, as in the case of Kabir, they laughed at the entire caste system and proclaimed that they belonged to every caste, implying there by that they believed in none or were above all castes. Kabir declares in one of his bhajans: "As a potmaker I make pots and keep them ready, as a washerman I make dirty clothes clean ; I tan untanned leather as a cobbler and tanner. I have thrown all my castes to the winds. I press out oil as an oilman, and with a whip keep the five bullocks on the right way. As the Kshatriya that I am, I cut asunder all the limitations to paths and yogas ; I am a barber, I am a carpenter; I am an Avadhuta. I obtain a victory over Yama in the game of gambling. I make this body into a boat, my mind into a steering rudder in that boat and with my tongue as the oars I get across the sea that this world is and make also others get over to the other side."

As in the above declamation by Kabir, some confusion meets us when we go through the writings left by the Panchasakha about their own castes and about caste in general. We could perhaps take the instance of Achyutananda as a case in point. His forefathers had been Kshatriyas, he says, but his grandfather took to the vocation of a karan, that is, a scribe and his father, when he settled at Puri was engaged as Khuntia by the order of the king in the temple of Jagannatha. Achyutananda's mother came from a Kshatriya family. But as he himself had not taken to the profession of his father or grandfather, he was

not willing to assume the family caste. He went out of his way to marry a Kshatriya girl from Jashovant Das's village, when he went to visit him there. And this out-of-caste marriage in fact made him an out-caste. Achutyananda proclaimed himself as well as his fold as belonging to that of the Gopalas, meaning those who were Lord Krishna's partners in the lila. He declared that a bhakta with the Shudra attitude was the best of bhaktas. As he says, the arrogant Brahmin with his monopoly of the scriptures had never enough humility to become a bhakta ; the Kshatriya had the temperament of a king and was all the time in the role of a punisher, thinking himself superior to all others ; he was dipped in violence as if it were the mission of his life. The Vaishya, engaged in buying and selling, is always after gain and profit, he had the give-and-take bargaining mentality of a tradesman, which was very far from the correct attitude of a bhakta. Only the Shudra, says Achutyananda, was congenially built with the right bent of mind for a bhakta. The Shudra was born to serve the other three varnas. Achutyananda says that as he himself was born in the world to serve Jagannatha, he was nothing but a Shudra. His attitude wasthe Shudra attitude. And he proclaims that he has no aspiration tobe a Brahmin, or a Kshatriya or a Vaishya ; he has opted to remain a Shudra because it is easier to have a real change within if one has the attitude of the Shudra. Achyutananda concludes that the Shudra type of bhakti is the real bhakti.

In the Jagamohan Ramayana, Balarama Das describes how Lord Jagannatha Himself had commanded him to sing the story of Rama and his deeds. Balarama says, he had been all along with the Lord, attending on Him and executing His orders and it was really His command to write the Ramayana as a Shudra in the Kali era. Balarama had only to carry out the order by becoming an instrument. On other occasions and in other books of his, he has declared himself to be a Bauri, one of the lowliest among the castes in Orissa. Achyutananda, in an alle-

gorical allusion, tells us that the Panchasakha had been Brahmins in the Satya era. Kshatriya in the Treta, Vaishyas in the Dwapara and were born as Shudras in the Kali era. And in the Ananta era, which relates to the essence and the eternal behind this apparent world, they have been only gopalas, or bhaktas whose role has been to sing about the lila of God and assist in its unfoldment as sakhas and servants.

The Panchasakha used the surname of Dasa, servant of God, to let it be forgotten for all intents and purposes that they were born and brought up in one or another of the so called castes. Taking a clue from the Vaishnava tradition prevailing all over India, they repudiated their respective castes and introduced themselves only as Dasas, servants who had chosen the service of God as their way of life. From their own accounts it becomes evident that they were never in the good books of the Brahmins. They were several times castigated and taken to task by the Brahmins who said that they called themselves Shudras only because they had not studied the sacred scriptures and therefore they were outside the pale so far as true knowledge was concerned. Achyutananda retorted that the Panchasakha were all well-acquainted with the Shastras and well-versed in the ways of yoga and the tantras ; but as they were servants and bhaktas by temperament and it was because of their special penchant for bhakti that they became Shudras and had declared themselves as such. Thus they were not Shudras by any case of a hierarchical society for which they had little regard. They were Shudras not because they were not qualified to be anything better, but they were Shudras by choice and as a protest against the values of the current social order which they would like to see replaced by a different set of values which they cherished and tried to propagate. "The Panchasakha wish to remain lowly and meek and we never consider the Shudras to be in any way lower than or inferior to us," says Achyutananda, "We are and have always been God's willing servants." In Achyutananda's

inimitable words, "We chose to become Shudras because we could not accept some of our fellow-beings as low and some as high." He concludes that the Panchasakha are not Brahmins, neither they are Kshatriyas or Vaishyas. Though they were not Shudras by birth, they took to the service of God as their calling and chose to become Shudras

These utterances palpitate with a boldness that comes from an unflinching faith and from the vision of a future order of society cherished by that faith. In an age when caste distinctions determined all norms and morals, all law and all decorum, when the king and the coteries around him were all for the old order and when the Lord Himsel seemed for all practical purposes to be on the side of the traditionalists and the patricians, the Panchasakha had to be extra ordinarily bold and courageous to declare themselves to be on the other side, on the side of a spiritual life that would not bow down before authority that would not betray itself by succumbing to power that be. They took people as people, man as man, aspiration after a better life as the sole criterion of one's worth and a sense of inner readiness and sincerity as proof that one was on the right path.

Chapter VII

THE BHAKTAS OF PROTEST

Balarama Das was a bhakta of protest. The entire cluster of the Panchasakha to which Balarama belonged in fact represented a movement of protest. The Panchasakha went against much that prevailed in their time as the style in the spiritual, religious and collective life of the people around them. Theirs was a protest against authority in the first place. They were not so much against authority as such, as against all authoritarian interference and imposition. They could not accept everything as genuine and sincere that succeeded in securing the king's approval and patronage. They refused to be swayed by the flood of Gaudiya Vaishnavism even if such refusal lost them the king's and his courtiers' protection. They had to face, authority's anger and many tests and much humiliation. Many an obstacle were placed on their path. But they put up with all and remained true to themselves. They could not be silenced by harsh treatment. They were always ready to bear the consequences of voicing a protest.

The Panchasakha's protest was also against all authoritarian Shastras and even against all authoritarian gurubad. They drank deep from the well of the Shastras and also made gurus. They took great pains to translate the important shastras to bring their essential contents within the reach of the nonscholarly average person. Yet they never let themselves be swallowed by the Shastras, neither did they allow the unique stances of a disciple's own mode of development to be smothered by any guru's dogmatic pretensions and drive towards uniformity. The Panchasakha never lagged in singing the glory of Lord

Jagannatha and the great values and goals He symbolised ; but they were all against any institution that tended to become stereotyped, insensative and authority-worshipping. They were keenly aware of the need for change in parts of the current social order for without such change freedom and equality in spiritual matters for all could not be established. They were against monastic domination, preoccupation with externals and all kinds of superficiality.

One need not be surprised that they were called all kinds of names by the believers in conformity. The dominant sects of the day called them Prachhanna Buddhas or Buddhists who were struggling to survive under other names and guises. Let us recall here that after Sankara and other stalwarts of the Hindu camp had been to Puri, Orissa's centuries-old Buddhistic tradition met with a debacle and rapidly declined. People were herded back into the Hindu fold with the full support of the powers that be and Lord Buddha was before long deified and given a place in the Hindu pantheon. He was no longer the prophet of protest who had come to break the idols, but was now the ninth Avatara in the familiar galaxy. There is historical evidence of persecution of Buddhist leaders and saints in the victorious Hindu camp and of their taking refuge in the hills and forests. The suspicion of a surreptitious existence of Buddhists still lingered, any one who deviated in the last from the entrenched Hindu ideology was accused and condemned as a Buddhist, a non-conformist, an undesirable element, a danger and what not. The Panchasakha were never enthusiastic about towing the majority's line or the official line ; they had chosen to act as the saving remnants. Thus it is no wonder that those, who chose the easy way of joining the vociferous winning camp and swimming with the tide, looked upon the Panchasakha with an eye of suspicion. The easiest way of attacking a recalcitrant was to call him a Buddhist in disguise or a Prachhanna Bauddha, to use the exact

technical term of abuse. Naturally the Panchasakha were not spared the accusation.

This has led some scholars to suggest that the Panchasakha were really Buddhists. These scholars seem to have taken the term Prachhanna Bauddha rather too literally. Had the Panchasakha really been Buddhists and nothing else, they would not have dabbled at so much length in discourses on Vedanta and Yoga, nor would they have accepted Shri Chaitanya as their guru. The use of the term Bauddha in this case was more in all allegorical than literal sense. Moreover it is not for the first time in India that the term was so used. The Mayavadins had also been called by the same name and Ramanuja himself has used it against Sankara. The application of the term can be traced even to an earlier time. In the Padma Purana, it has been put in the mouth of Shiva himself that Mayavada belonged to the class of inferior shastras in the category of those called Prachhanna Bauddha. Some critics of Sankara have called him a Prachhanna Bauddha. In the same way perhaps, the Panchasakha in Orissa were being called Prachhanna Bauddhas by those who did not agree with their point of view and their preference of the inner to the outer, of the essentials to the non-essentials.

As Gaudiya Vaishnavism got the lion's share of the king's patronage, the nirguna tradition of the Panchasakha had a set back and had to go to the hills and forests, in order to avoid persecution, if not for anything else. Yet we can see the tradition trying to survive in the many odds and adverse conditions. The literature now discussed as belonging to the period of about three centuries that followed the Panchasakha consists mainly of the Kavyas, Chhandas and Champus which drew their main inspiration from the Gaudiya Vaishnava sources. However the other tradition also, though outside the limelight and perhaps confined to small clusters of followers around isolated masters, was definitely trying to keep itself alive. Even now a large number of gadis all over Orissa, known by the name of a

particular master, continue to carry on their own solitary existence. The works which belonging to this tradition during its distress are yet to be properly discovered and studied. The first names in this category are Chaitanya Das's *Nirguna Mahatmya* and *Bishnugarbha Purana.* Then comes Dwaraka Das with his *Parache Gita.* Next is Arakshita Das, celebrated writer of the well-known *Mahimandala Gita.* To these may be added a few others that are available such as Debananda Das's *Baichandra Gita* and Dinakrushna Das's *Namabrahma Gita.* The tradition that seemed moribund was thus surviving flashed again into life in the Mahima Dharma of the 19th century Orissa, with Bhima Bhoi as its poet. Mahima Dharma was a very powerful religious movement and spread even outside the Oriya language area. Bhima Bhoi was the last great religious poet of Orissa of those days and that tradition; he came from one of the very lowest castes, was against all gods and sects, sang about the great brotherhood of men and gave a totally different meaning to salvation. He prayed in his songs for the redemption of the world though he himself might be in hell. There are scholars who would brand the Mahima Dharma also as a form of Buddhism. They fail to understand that the Panchasakha down to Mahima Dharma and its poet Bhima Bhoi represents a single tradition in religion and literature. We may call it a tradition of protest, protest against authoritarian religion and authoritarian society, protest against caste and against externality in spiritual life. It flourished outside the courts of kings and their patronage. Its leaders have been the main architect of the Oriya language, bringing the gap that existed between the language of the books and the spoken language of the people. They have been instrumental in weaning the regional language from classical Sanskrit. And more than anything else, they have constantly tried to rescue the institution of Lord Jagannatha from ritualism, from externalistic obsessions and from vested interests. They left no stone unturned in reminding their times of the values that the institution of Jagannatha stood for and

always tried to restore these values through their writings against the opposition and the cultist zeal of those who were in possession of that institution. The climax was reached when in the nineteenth century the followers of Bhima Bhoi laid a siege to the Jagannatha temple and claimed that it was they who were the real heirs to the institution and not the king and the priests. Thus, before putting any particular label on this tradition of protest or calling it Buddhistic for that matter, we should delve deeper and try to understand the real nature of the trends of this tradition and their manifestations from time to time.

But it should be kept in mind that the Panchasakha's was not merely negative voice of protest. They were never mere iconoclasts, breakers of all idols for fun's sake. Their mission was never meant to end just in a protest. The Panchasakha had a more enduring commitment. Whatever they did was prompted by a vision, the vision of a new society for which they worked in their own way. Salvation did not mean for them running away from the world ; on the contrary they wanted to reconstruct society and make it fit for the pursuit by every individual of his highest aspirations Theirs was a dream of establishing a city of God on earth, a civitas Dei. But this was to be established not in contradistinction with the civitas terrena, as St. Angustine had dreamed. The Panchasakha believed that this world could be transformed into a God's world as it were. They aimed at a complete regeneration of man's life, individually as well as collectively and both on a spiritual basis.

The Panchasakha belonged to the India of the middle ages. The middle ages in Europe were characterised by bigotry, by religious persecution and a cold indifference to human feeling. Spritual zeal seemed to be exhausting itself in a philosophy called scholasticism that foundered on the rock of the so called universals. The leaders of thought, almost the entire lot of them, were living double lives in the field of intellect and reason, they were speculating with the utmost abandon on the real truth of things

while in actual life they were putting up with tyrants and their evil deeds. But we find a contrast, as we look at the middle ages in India as a whole. We see here the leaders of thought and pioneers in spirit, seized with a powerful vision and an urge for synthesis eager to assimilate the essentials with the utmost breadth of outlook. These saints and mystics of the middle ages in India never submitted to the kings, showed no indifference to the realities of existence, were great affirmers and upholders of life's permanent values. They were leaders of men, of the best in man. They became instrumental in creating new languages, new literature and a new synthetic outlook. The middle ages in Europe have been described by critics as a long night when conscience of man seemed to have taken leave and gone to sleep. The learned men were then busy in exploring the real nature of things with the help of reason, a very poor instrument for the job indeed.

In contrast, the middle ages in the India with its leaders in the realm of ideas constituted a period of great upheavals as it were. The leaders really rescued the minds of people from the thraldom of the sectarian Puranas, from superstition and from bonds of a language they did not speak. Whenever, in any age, India will be re-entrusting itself with the task of coming back to the essentials and building anew, she must again and again refer herself to her saints of the middle ages for spiritual replenishment. She will remember with gratitude her Kabir, her Nanak and Dadu, her Tukaram and Jnaneswar and Purandara Das. In Orissa, will be remembered the Panchasakha, Balarama, Jagannatha and Achyutananda. The seeds of India's spiritual life were no doubt in her Vedas and Upanishads, but having been written in Sanskrit and therefore accessible to the enlightened few, they had perhaps always been wealth reserved for a select aristocracy of the spirit. During the subsequent centuries they were in the selfish possession of the pundits and Brahmins. They came to be reckoned as wealth belonging to the whole

people only in the middle ages, when the saints and mystics, mostly hailing from the lay classes gained through realisation the age-old legacy for the whole people, including the lowliest.

The process started with Sudramuni Sarala Das in Orissa and came to full fruition during the Panchasakha period. While the pundits flourished in the courts with their feats of erudition, the Panchasakha brought knowledge within the reach of the people, transforming buried wealth into current coin. Culture got a new fillip and attained altogether a new dimension. An Oriya Bhagavata or an Oriya Ramayana ushered in situations in which communities could develop through new emotional affinities The rural community structure in Orissa with the wealth of its great tradition lived through various relationships and occasions of mutuality owes much to the Oriya Bhagavata and the Oriya Ramayana, and to their writers,— Jagannatha Das and Balarama Das.

APPENDIX

A FEW SAMPLERS

BALARAMA Das represents an entire age, an epoch that gave a special characteristic and definite directions to the thought affiliations of the time. The epoch is the Panchasakha epoch, and whenever we say anything about Balarama Das, it is only from the great store-house of the period as a whole that we are entitled to speak.

Below, we have given a few samplers from that period. Most of them are from Balarama Das of course but we have a few others also. These are not meant to prove anything, but for those who do not know the Oriya language and Oriya scripts, they will greatly help them to make an idea about the unassumingness and straightness of the style in which the Panchasakha expressed themselves.

The language used by the Panchasakha has gone home so deep to the people that even after four centuries, people take a fancy to get by heart several lines from them at one stretch, and use them in their conversation as models of expression. The Bhagavata and the Ramayana have remained to be what the English translation of the Bible quite a time ago has remained to many English speaking people.

1. श्रीराम अवतारे जिस जिस क्रीड़ा कले
ताहा बालमीक मुनि मुख कुहाइले ।
मुहि ताहा उच्चारइ शरधा निमन्ते
तुम्भे आज्ञा देइअछ अनुग्रह चित्ते ॥

—बलराम दास : जगमोहन रामायण, उत्तरा काण्ड

Shrirāma abatāré jisa jisa kridā kalé
tāhā bālamika muni mukhé kuhāilé.
Muhin tāhā uchchārai sharadhā nimanté
tumbhe ājnā déiachha anugraha chitté.

—Balarama Das : Jagamohana Ramayana,
Uttara Kanda.

2. श्री जगमोहन एहि रामायण ग्रन्थ
एथिर कवि जे नीलगिरि जगन्नाथ ।
से प्रभु मोहर हृदे बिजे करिथान्ति ।
आपनार चरित आपण बखाणन्ति ।
इन्दुर बिबरु कि उदित श्वेत अहि
मोर मुखुँ रामायण ग्रन्थ तेन्हे होइ ॥

—बलराम दास : जगमोहन रामायण, उत्तरा काण्ड

Shree Jagamohana éhi rāmāyana grantha,
Éthira Kabi jé neelagiri Jagannātha,
Sé prabhu mohara hrudé bijé karithanti,
Āpanāra charita āpana bakhānanti.
Indura bibaru ki udita shwéta ahi,
Mora mukhu rāmāyana grantha ténhé hoi.

—Balarama Das : Jagamohana Ramayana,
Uttara Kanda.

3. संसार निमन्ते मुहिँ घोषइ पुण पुणि
तुम्भे मोते दया कर देब शूलपाणि
सातकाण्ड रामायण करिते मोर मन
नीलगिरि नाथ मोते होइबा प्रसन्न।
तेणुकरि मुहिँ जे छाड़िलि सर्व कार्य
ग्रन्थ कहिबाकु मुँहि जे करइ वड़ लाज।
लोक उपहासकु मुँ वड़इ डरइ
मूर्खजन मानकु मुहिँ वड़ भय जे करइ॥
पण्डित धार्मिक लोके नधरन्ति दोष
अलप जाणिला लोके करन्ति वड़ रोष।
तेणुकरि आत्माकु मुँ संकोचि भालइ
सूचिमुने पर्वत मुँ ताड़िते लोड़इ॥

—वलराम दास : जगमोहन रामायण, सुन्दरा काण्ड

Sansāra nimanté muhiṇ ghosai puna puni
tumbhé moté dayā kara deba shulapāni.
Sātakānda rāmāyana karité mora mana
nīlagiri nātha moté hoibā prasanna.
Ténukari muhiṇ jé chhādili sarba kārjya
Grantha kahibāku muhiṇ jé karai bada lāja.
Loka upahāsaku muṇ badai darai,
murkhajana mānanku muhiṇ bada bhaya jé karai.
Pandita dhārmika loké nadharanti dosa,
alpa jānilā loké karanti bada rosa.
Ténukari ātmaku muṇ saṃkoché bhālai
Suchimuné parbata muṇ tādite lodai.

—Balarama Das : Jagamohana Ramayana, Sundara Kanda.

4. ऐसनक समये श्रीराम वाम कर
दक्षिण भुजकु सेहि कहइ उत्तर ।
    संग्राम कालरे किंपा पछकु पलाउ
    तोहर परा लोक निसत किंपा हेउ ।
दक्षिण भुज बोलइ ताकु एहा सुणि
तु जाहा बोइलु हो नुहइ एहु वाणी ।
    मुहिँ संग्रामरे किंपा देबि पछघुंचा
    कैणसि कालरे नुहइ पछलुचा ।
फला मेलिबारे तुहि मोत पछ करि
करबाल घेनि मुहिँ आग थाट मारि ।
    जेबन कारणे मुहिँ पछकु अइलि
    श्रीरामचन्द्र दक्षिण कर्णरे कहिलि ।
करुणासागर अटन्ति जे रघुनाथ
छेदिबे कि न छेदिबे एहि दशमाथ ।
    सत पचारिबाकु जे असिअछि मुँहि
    आज्ञा होइले शत्रुकु मारिबइँ जाइ ॥

—बलराम दास : जगमोहन रामायण, लंकाकाण्ड

Ésanaka samaye shrīrāma bāma kara
dakshina bhujaku séhi kahai uttara.
    Sangrāma kālare kiṃpā pachhaku palāu
    tohara parā loka nisata kiṃpā heu.
Dakshina bhūja bolai tāku éha shuni
tu jāhā boilu ho nuhai éhu bānī.
    Muhiṇ saṃgrāmare kiṃpā debi pachhaghunchā
    kaīnasi kālaré nuhai pachhaluchā.
Falā mélibāré tuhi mote pachha kari
    Karabāla ghéni muhiṇ āga thāta māri.
Jébana kārane muhiṇ pachhaku aili
Shrīrāmachandra dakshina karnaré kahili.
    Karunāsāgara atanti jé raghunātha
    chhédibé ki nachhédibé éhi dashamātha.
Sata pacharibāku jé asiachhi muhiṇ
Ājnā hoilé shatruku māribaṇ jai.

—Balarama Das : Jagamohan Ramayana,
Lanka Kanda.

5. अति बुद्धिमन्त जे होइले नाश-जाइ
अति सुचीमन्त अनाचारी जे हुअइ ।
अति सत्यवन्तर हरइ यश शत्रु
अति प्रियजनकु निकट होइ मृत्यु ।
अति बलबंत केबे नपारइ चालि
अति धर्म कले नसहइ महीस्थली ।
अति हिं पढिले हुअन्ति नरे बाइ
अति हिं धनवन्ता त नपारइ खाइ ।
अति हिं दानवन्त करइ बहुपाप
अति हिं दयालुर बहुत थाइ धाप ।
अति हिं कषिले सुना हुअइ जे भेल
अति हिं कषोट कले ब्रह्महत्या तुल ।
अति हिं सन्थपण कालक रघुपति
भण्डंक भण्डकथारे तेजिला जुबती ॥
—बलराम दास : जगमोहन रामायण, उत्तराकाण्ड

Ati buddhimanta jé hoilé nāsha jāi
ati shuchīmanta anāchari jé huai.
Ati satyabantara harai jasha shatru
ati priyajanku nikata hoi mrutyu
Ati balabanta kebe naparai chāli
ati dharma kale nasahai mahīsthalī
ati hiṇ paddhile huanti nare bāi
ati hiṇ dhanabantā ta naparai khāt.
Ati hiṇ danabanta karai bahu pāpa
ati hiṇ dayalura bahuta thāi dhāpa.
Ati hiṇ kasilé sunā huai je bhéla
ati hiṇ kasota kalé brahmahatyā tula.
Ati hiṇ santhapana kālaka raghupati
bhandanka bhandakathare tejilā jubatī

—Balarama Das : Jagamohan Ramayana,
Uttara Kanda.

6. शिला सालचण्डी मंगला शिव
व्रत तीर्थ तिथि करिबा भाव ।
एहि रसरे मातिला निरते
ईश्वरंकु नचिन्हिला जगते ।..
नजाणन्ति अरूप बोलिण बासुदेव
प्रतिमा पितुला करि करुथान्ति भाव ।
देखु देखु शुणुथान्ति नबुझन्ति जन,
पूजाकला देवता न नकहे वचन ।
रूप तीर्थ व्रत पूजा होम कर्म मिछ
देवदेवी माया ए पटल सबु तुच्छ ॥
—बलराम दास : छतिश गुप्त गीता

Shilā sālachandi mangalā shiba,
brata tirtha tithi kariba bhāba,
Éhi Rasaré mātilā niraté,
Ishawaranku nachinhila jagate...
Najānanti arupa bolina basudeba,
Pratimā pitulā kari karuthānti bhāba.
Dékhu dékhu shunuthanti nabujhanti jana,
Pūjakala debatā ta nakahé bachana.
Rupa tirtha brata pūjā homa karma michha
Débadébī māyā é patala sabu tuchha.
—Balarama Das : Chhatisha Gupta Gita.

7. वैश्य तो नयन अटइ
क्षत्रिय श्रवणकु कहि ।
ब्राह्मण नासार पवन
शूद्र जे मुखरे प्रमाण ।
एमन्ते चारिजाति कहि
ज्योतिमध्यरु जन्म होइ ॥
—अच्युतानन्द दास : गुप्त गीता

Baishya to nayana atai,
Kshatriya shrabanaku kahi.

Brāhmana nāsāra pabana,
Shudra jé mukharé pramāna.
Émanté chārijāti kahi
Jyotimadhyaru janma hoi.
—Achyutananda Das : Gupta Gita.

8. आद्यरे क्षत्रिय भकत भाव
प्रकृति बिनाशि नाशइ खेद।
पांच पचाश बिनाश करे
छड़ एकादश सेहु संहारे।
एकमने भकत बाणिज्य करे
वैश्यवृत्तिरे जे कृष्णनामरे।
द्वितीय भाव निश्चल होइले
तृतीय ब्राह्मण कर्म आचरे।
मन्त्र मूर्त्ति क्रिया कर्मकु घेनि
सेहिभावे सारे ए ब्रह्मज्ञानी।
ब्रह्मप्राप्तिरे निश्चल होइला
ब्रह्मपद सेवा नहुँ से कला।
तहुँ भकत शूद्र बोलावन्ति
भकति पथरे निश्चल होन्ति॥
—अच्युतानन्द दास : वर्णटीका

Ādyaré kshatriya bhakata bhābe,
Prakruti bināshi nāshai khéda.
Pancha pachashā binasha karè
Chhada Ekadasha sehu saṁhāre.
Ékamané bhakta bānijya karé
Baishyabruttiré jé krushnanāmare.
Dwitīya bhāba nischala hoile
Trutīya brāhmana karma ācharé.

Mantra mūrti kriya karmakugheni
Séhibhābé sāra é brahmajnānī.
Brāhmaprāptiré nischala hoilā
Brāhmapadé sébā tahuṇ sé kalā.
Tahuṇ bhakata Shūdra bolābanti
Bhakati pātharé nischala honti.

—Achyutanda Das : Barnatika.

9\. तेवे नरजन्म हेब माया अन्धार फिटिब
सहजानन्द चरणे लगाअ आशा
ए अंगे कारण पाइ हरेरामकृष्ण एहि
तिनि अंग मिशि गुरु रूप सदृशा ॥
एहि अंग आश्रे करि सुकृत दुष्कृत हरि
कृष्णप्राप्ति पथ एहु अटइ जान ॥
अन्य अंग नरदेहो सहज मनोषा एहि
ए अंग नभजि तुहें महत जन ॥
सहजे मनुष्य हेब सहजानन्द चिन्हिब
सहजे ताहार गति होइब सिना ॥
सहज भाब जाणिब सहज प्रेम माणिब
सहजे ब्रह्मरे लीन होइब किना ॥
—बलराम दास : ज्ञान उज्जलमणि गीता

Tébé narajanma héba māyā andhāra phitiba
sahajānanda charané lagāa āshā.
É angé kārana pāi haréramakrushna éhi
tini anga mishi guru rupa sadrushā.
Éhi anga āshre kari sukruta duskruta hari
krushnaprāptipatha éhu atai jana,

Anya anga naradéhī sahaja manīsā éhi
é anga nabhaji nuhéṇ mahate jana.
Sahajé manushya heba sahajānanda chihniba
sahajé tāhāra gati hoiba sina.
Sahaja bhāba jāniba sahaja préma maniba
sahaje brahmare lina hoiba kinā.

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